

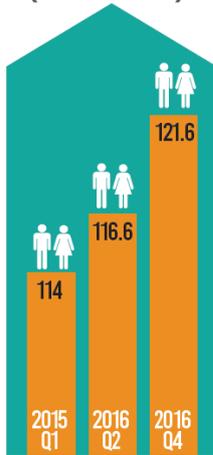


# ACTION PLAN FOR JOBS: MIDLANDS

An Roinn Post, Fiontar agus Nuálaíochta  
Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

2nd Progress Report, June – December 2016

## Numbers Employed (Thousands)



Persons aged 15 years and over in **Employment** (Thousand)

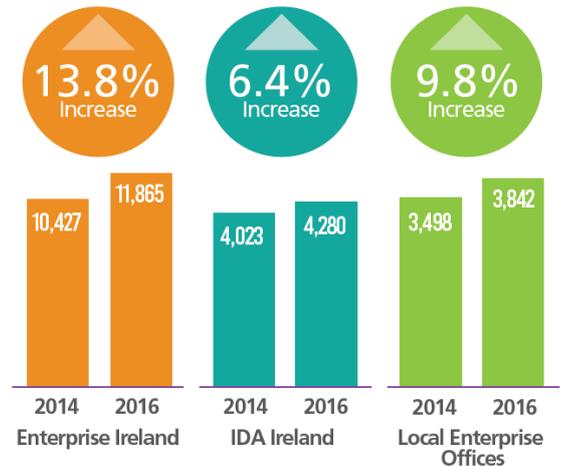
Source: CSO QNHS (QNQ22)

## Unemployment rate



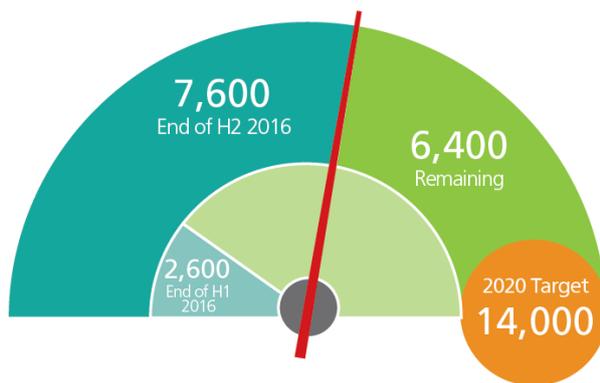
ILO **Unemployment Rate** (15 - 74 years) (%)

## Jobs in Agency Supported Businesses



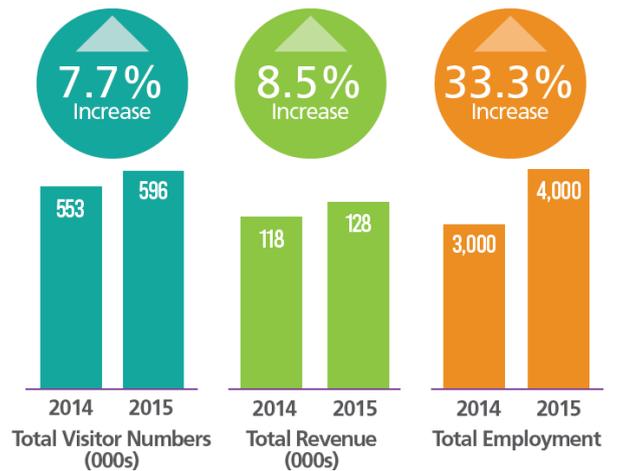
Sources: DJEI Annual Employment Survey and Local Enterprise Office Annual Employment Survey.

## Midlands Regional Jobs Target Q1 2015 – Q4 2019 Progress from Q1 2015 to Q4 2016



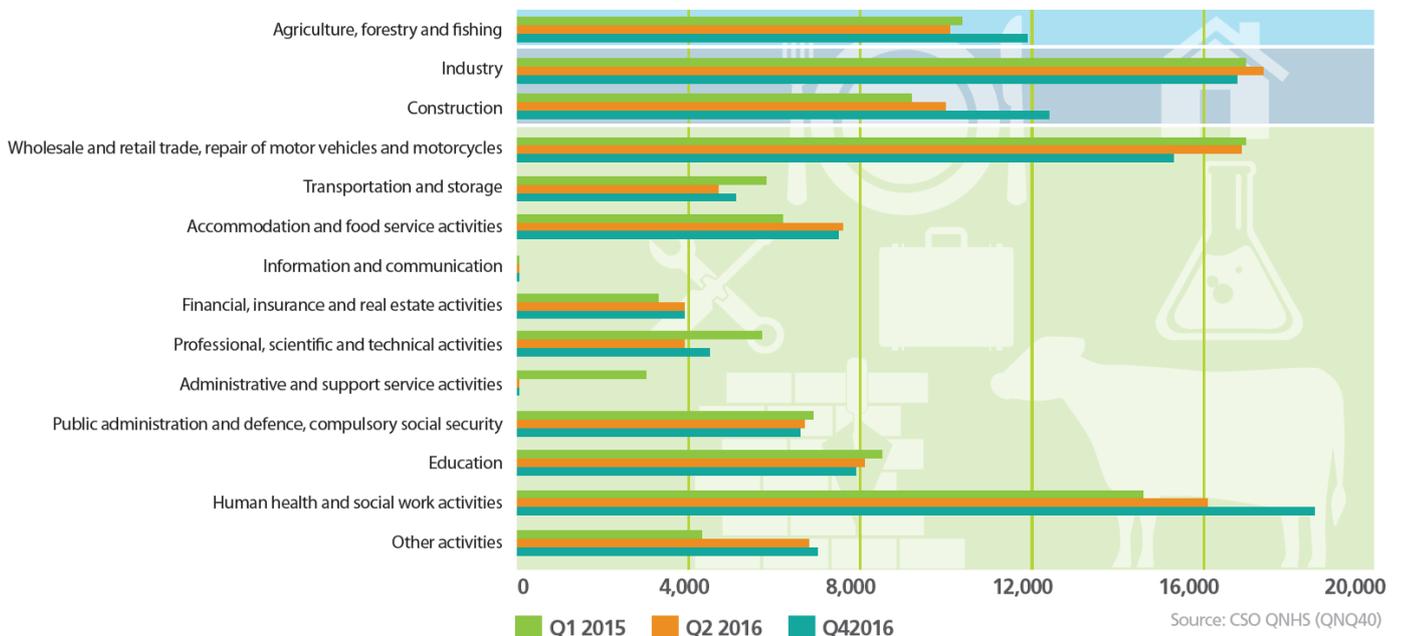
Source: CSO QNHS (QNQ22)

## Tourism in the Midlands



Source: Fáilte Ireland  
2016 figures unavailable at time of publication

## Employment by Sector



Source: CSO QNHS (QNQ40)

## Commentary

This is the second Progress Report from the Implementation Committee established by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation to oversee and monitor implementation of the measures contained in the Midland Region Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. The report outlines progress made on measures due for completion up to and including the second half of 2016, as well as progress made on measures that are Ongoing during the 2015-2017 period of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan for Jobs for the Midland Region was launched on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The core objective of the Plan is to support the creation of an extra 14,000 jobs across the counties of Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois by 2020 through the delivery of 121 collaborative actions focusing on increasing the number of entrepreneurs/ start-ups, developing the capacity of existing enterprises, with further actions targeted at sectors of potential competitive advantage such as manufacturing, tourism, food and energy. Increasing the number of people in employment by 14,000 by 2020 will represent a 13% growth in the numbers employed in the region in 2014. This represents an important step towards the target, as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government's ambition of creating 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, with 135,000 of these to be outside Dublin.

The Regional Action Plans are monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the Enterprise Sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. The Midland Implementation Committee is chaired by Mr Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive of Westmeath County Council.

In 2007, when the economy last enjoyed full employment, the Midland Region had an unemployment rate of 3.7% - the lowest of all regions. However there was a very significant dependence on employment in the construction sector which employed over 20,000 people at that time. During the recession some 15,000 Construction jobs were lost and this contributed greatly to the high unemployment rate in the region which, by Q3 2011, stood at 19.6%.

There has been a substantial improvement in the Midlands region since the commencement of the National Action Plan for Jobs in 2012, with an additional 15,900 in employment in Q4 2016 compared to Q4 2012.

Progress in job creation and addressing unemployment has continued strongly since 2012. The unemployment rate in the region currently stands at 7.9% compared to the national rate of 6.7%<sup>1</sup>. The Midland Region is the fourth fastest growing region in terms of employment growth since 2014 (South West, Dublin and South East), up 6.5% and ahead of the national average growth rate of 5.9%<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> CSO Quarterly National Household Survey Q4 2016

<sup>2</sup> The Midland region is the second fastest growing region in terms of employment growth since 2012 (Q3 2012: Q3 2016, after the South East), up 14.1% and ahead of the national average growth rate of 10.8%.

## **Actions due by December 2016**

By the second half of 2016, Departments and Agencies have already delivered, or are on track, for delivering on time 115 of the Midland Regions Action Plan's 121 actions. Four actions are deemed 'no longer relevant' and four are deemed delayed. This represents an overall completion / implementation rate of 96.5%. H2 2016 saw the addition of two new actions, Actions 120 and 121, a testament to the dynamic nature of the Action Plan.

## ***Noteworthy Developments***

### ***STERIS***

In October, STERIS Applied Sterilization Technology (AST) based at the IDA Technology Park in Srah, Tullamore, County Offaly announced it is building a new electron beam operation, and expanding its microbiology lab. This expansion will enable Steris to expand their existing workforce, in addition to construction jobs.

### ***Mergon Global Innovation Centre, MiCentre***

The MiCentre in Castlepollard, Co Westmeath is the amalgamation of Mergon's expertise in advanced manufacturing, robotics, automation and failsafe technologies, under one roof. The MiCentre will pilot and prove out production lines for the company's rapidly growing business in Ireland, USA and Czech Republic. The MiCentre will be home to Mergon's Lightweight Lab, dedicated to innovations that will optimise weight reduction of automotive components. In addition the MiCentre also houses Mergon's expanding capabilities in additive manufacturing and 3D printing.

### ***Teleflex***

Teleflex is considering further expansion in Athlone, with the opening of new global operations headquarters in the IDA Business & Technology Park, Athlone. 250 people are currently employed by Teleflex.

### ***Biopharma, MedTech Engineering National Fair***

Regional Skills Forum (RSF) held a Life Science Career Opportunities – Biopharma, MedTech Engineering National Fair in Athlone Institute of Technology on September 28<sup>th</sup> 2016. The event hosted 50 Life Science companies from the Midlands, Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Galway, Limerick and Mayo. The event showcased employment opportunities, with 602 jobs on offer on the day, career advice for Transition Year students on skills within the sector and hosted CV and interview workshops throughout the day. Attendance was recorded at 1013 people.

### ***Internet of Things (IoT) Network***

The State's first Internet of Things (IoT) network was switched on in Athlone in October. The network which is owned by VT Networks operates through 2rn's national broadcast and telecommunications infrastructure, which gives it huge resilience, coverage and robustness. 2rn's involvement has made the fast rollout of a nationwide IoT network possible. This will allow VT to bring a SIGFOX network, valued at €10 million, to the entire country in a record-setting five months.

### **Abbott Ireland**

Longford County Council has given Abbott Ireland approval to develop an extension to its existing plant at Lisnamuck. The development will include a new production facility of more than 1,800 square metres, while a warehouse of 1,000 square metres will also be built. It's understood it could lead to the creation of up to 200 new jobs.

### **Regional Food Producers Directory**

The MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food Producers Directory 2016 was launched by Minister Michael Creed at the National Ploughing Championships. The MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food Producers Directory 2016 showcases the outputs of a CEDRA Agri-Food Tourism Initiative. This project enabled food producers in the Midland Region to develop a strong marketing portfolio for their products; with 100 regional producers participating in the project. The directory profiles producers across diverse categories which include Bakery; Beverages; Confectionery; Catering / Cookery Schools / Training; Dairy; Meats; Organic; Prepared Foods; Preserves and Produce.

### **Taste of the Lakelands International Food Festival**

The Inaugural Taste of the Lakelands International Food Festival took place in Lanesboro, County Longford in October 2016, with 6,000 attendees. This was supported by Longford County Council, Longford Enterprise Board and MidlandsIreland.ie.

### **Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ)**

Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) are functional areas that reflect the spatial patterns of local economic activities and development processes. The 2016 REDZ scheme provides funding for projects of differing scale and ambition that share the mutual objective of supporting economic development in rural areas, with a particular focus on maximising the synergies between towns and their hinterlands and encouraging collaboration between Local Authorities on larger projects.

The funding covers:

- Flagship projects – 1 in each Regional Assembly Region
- 9 Medium scale projects – 3 in each Regional Assembly region to a max grant of €200,000 per project.
- Small REDZ projects – to a maximum grant of €100,000

In November, 41 projects were approved nationwide in the amount of €5.3M, with over €1 million in funding awarded to projects in the Midland Region, including the only Flagship Regional project in the East & Midlands Region.

Projects funded across the region are detailed below:

| <b>Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) 2016: Approved Projects</b> |        |                 |                                   |
|--|--------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Midland Region   | County | Amount Approved | Project Details:                  |
| <b>Small Projects – up to €100,000</b>                                 |        |                 |                                   |
| <b>Business of Food</b>  | Laois  | €67,200         | Ten month programme of workshops, |

|   |           |          |   |
|---|-----------|----------|---|
|   |           |          | mentoring sessions and events designed to assist people in the Food Service Industry to improve their business. |
| <b>Fab lab Portarlington</b>                          | Laois     | €32,800  | Communal Office for training hot-desking  |
| <b>Banagher</b>                                       | Offaly    | €50,000  | Enhance town around marina  |
| <b>Kilcormac</b>                                      | Offaly    | €48,000  | To promote & market awareness of Kilcormac as the gateway to Lough Boora Discovery                              |
| <b>Mullingar &amp; Athlone Blueways and Greenways</b> | Westmeath | €96,000  | Blueways and Greenways unlocking potential Athlone Municipal District   |
| <b>Royal Canal to Lough Owel Amenity Area</b>         | Westmeath | €96,000  | The Royal Canal Cycleway Extension Mullingar Municipal District   |
| <b>Corlea Walking Route Longford</b>                  | Longford  | €100,000 | Walking Route   |
| <b>Corn Hill Amenity Walk Project</b>                 | Longford  | €50,000  | Develop a walking loop around the top of Corn Hill on the exterior boundaries of the forest area                |
| <b>Medium Projects – up to €200,000</b>               |           |          |   |
| <b>Granard Motte, Longford</b>                        | Longford  | €200,000 | Develop Interpretive Centre around Granard Motte  |
| <b>Flagship Regional Project – up to €400,000</b>     |           |          |   |
| <b>Birr Castle</b>                                    | Offaly    | €316,870 | Provision of Education Centre Birr, County Offaly   |

### **Clár**

CLÁR is a targeted investment programme that provides funding for small infrastructural projects in rural areas that have experienced significant depopulation. The programme provides funding under three measures:

- Safety package for Schools/Community Facilities
- Outdoor Play Facilities Enhancement Scheme/support for the development of Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA).
- Local Access Roads

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, Michael Ring TD, Minister of State for Regional Economic Development, announced the allocation of over €700,000 to projects the Midland Region under CLÁR 2016 (with Laois allocated €148,900; Longford allocated €237,560; Offaly allocated €123,398 and Westmeath allocated €214,280).

### **Rural Recreation Scheme**

Minister Michael Ring announced allocations under the Rural Recreation Scheme in September with approx.€850,000 allocated to the Midland Region for the provision of

recreational infrastructure (c. €352,000 – Laois; €30,000 – Longford, €292,000- Westmeath; €173,000 Offaly).

| <b>Local Authority Projects</b>           |               |                      |  |               |
|---|---------------|----------------------|--|---------------|
| <b>Organisation</b>                       | <b>County</b> | <b>Area</b>          | <b>Brief outline of Proposal</b>                   | <b>Amount</b> |
| Offaly CoCo                               | Offaly        | Durrow               | Develop Spur to allow access to Durrow High Cross  | €172,959      |
| Laois CoCo                                | Laois         | Mountmellick         | Promote four cycle trails in Slieve Bloom          | €19,000       |
| Laois CoCo                                | Laois         | Portarlinton         | Development, expansion and re-route of trails      | €37,000       |
| Laois CoCo                                | Laois         | Mountmellick         | Enhance parking facilities and upgrade access road | €200,000      |
| Westmeath CoCo                            | Westmeath     | Mullingar            | Linking 2 cycle route and provide a car park       | €56,000       |
| Westmeath CoCo                            | Westmeath     | Kilbeggan            | Provision of an on road cycle link                 | €115,140      |
| Westmeath CoCo                            | Westmeath     | Castletown Geoghegan | Castletown Geoghegan Car Parking                   | €48,050       |
| <b>Local Development Company Projects</b> |               |                      |  |               |
| Laois Partnership Company (LPC)           | Laois         | Abbeyleix            | Construction of a bog bridge and maintenance       | €20,762       |
| LPC                                       | Laois         | Cushina              | Development of 3 Looped Walks                      | €64,500       |
| LPC                                       | Laois         | Durrow               | Feasibility Study, Mapboards and People Counters   | €10,516       |
| <b>Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)</b>     |               |                      |  |               |
| IFI                                       | Westmeath     | Athlone              | Maintenance of Angling Facilities - The Meadows    | €73,000       |
| IFI                                       | Longford      | Ballinalee.          | construct a boat slip, jetty and fencing           | €29,100       |

### ***Town & Village Renewal***

Over €1.4m in funding has been announced for Midland projects to help “breathe life” back into rural towns and villages under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. 26 projects in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath are benefiting from the fund this year, with each county allocated €360,000 for community projects.

Seven projects in Laois are receiving funding: Mountmellick, Ballinakill, Ballyroan, Shanahoe, Donaghmore, Mountrath and Portarlinton. Portarlinton is the biggest beneficiary, receiving €100,000.

Eight projects in Longford are receiving funding: Abbeyshrule, Aughnaccliffe, Drumlish, Edgeworthstown, Granard, Lanesborough, Longford and Newtownforbes; with Longford Town as the biggest beneficiary, receiving €88,400.

Clara and Edenderry are each receiving €100,000 in Offaly, with a further €90,000 going to both Kinnitty and Shannonbridge.

Seven projects are being funded in Westmeath in Moate, Castlepollard, Kinnegad, Ballymore, Clonmellon, Streamstown and Kilbeggan, the later receiving €100,000 for Town Park, Cycleway and Memorial Recording projects.

### ***Best Library Service - Excellence in Local Government Awards***

Offaly County Council was awarded Best Library Service at the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards 2016 in November for 'My Open Library' Initiative.

### ***Entente Florale Competition 2016***

Tullamore was awarded a Gold Award in the Entente Florale, one of only three towns to receive a Gold award. The Entente Florale is a competition that operates to promote a greener and more pleasant environment in European towns and villages through landscape development and horticulture. The International Jury – coming from the 8 member countries of Entente Florale bases the Award on a scoring system that examined Tullamore on the following considerations:

- Quality of landscape and vegetation: seasonal and permanent planting of flowers, trees, shrubs; respect for landscape and landscape policies, promotion of biodiversity and ecologically friendly maintenance and management.
- Quality of natural and built environments including waste management, water management, heritage, quality of streets and buildings and cleanliness.
- Participation and cooperation by local bodies and organisations, contribution and role of local statutory authorities.
- Education and schools- ecology and green dimension, and other educational endeavours.
- Attractiveness and presentation- tourism and leisure policy, information and communication to locals and to the public at large- preparation and presentation of the town for the actual assessment visit.

### ***Progress on Areas for Further Job Creation***

#### ***Center Parcs***

The recent announcement that Center Parcs were granted planning permission for a €230m holiday village in Ballymahon, Longford is a welcome boost for the entire region. The project is expected to create 1,000 permanent jobs for a holiday village park in Longford. In addition, 750 people are expected to be employed during the construction phase, which will see more than 400 holiday lodges being built in a forest near Ballymahon. On November 9<sup>th</sup>, Center Parcs announced that it has awarded the first construction contract for its holiday

village to a Mullingar firm, Bennett Construction Limited, who will build a four kilometre public footpath and security fence around the perimeter of the 395 acre site

### ***Trail Development***

The development and roll out of the National Cycle Network, including the phase from Athlone and Mullingar, which will link Dublin and Galway affords many opportunities to link with and develop complementary strategic corridors and routes to the South and North of the region. The benefits that trails can bring to the area in which they are situated is evidenced by the success of the Great Western Greenway and similar projects around the country. These benefits are not just confined to jobs created and sustained through the construction of the trails, but extend to the spend on food, drink and accommodation by those using the trails. These benefits are in addition to the physical and mental health benefits that cycling and walking bring, which are well documented.

In July, the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport granted funding to Longford and Westmeath County Councils for projects which build on and enhance the great success of the Old Rail Trail between Athlone and Mullingar providing the country with a long distance, multi-day, off-road cycling. The two projects will be completed by the year end and will connect Abbeyshrule to Longford Bridge, Ballymahon - a 15.2km extension from Mullingar to Abbeyshrule (€513,000) and in Westmeath a 2.2km extension from Garycastle to Whitegates to the Mullingar to Athlone Greenway (€496,187).