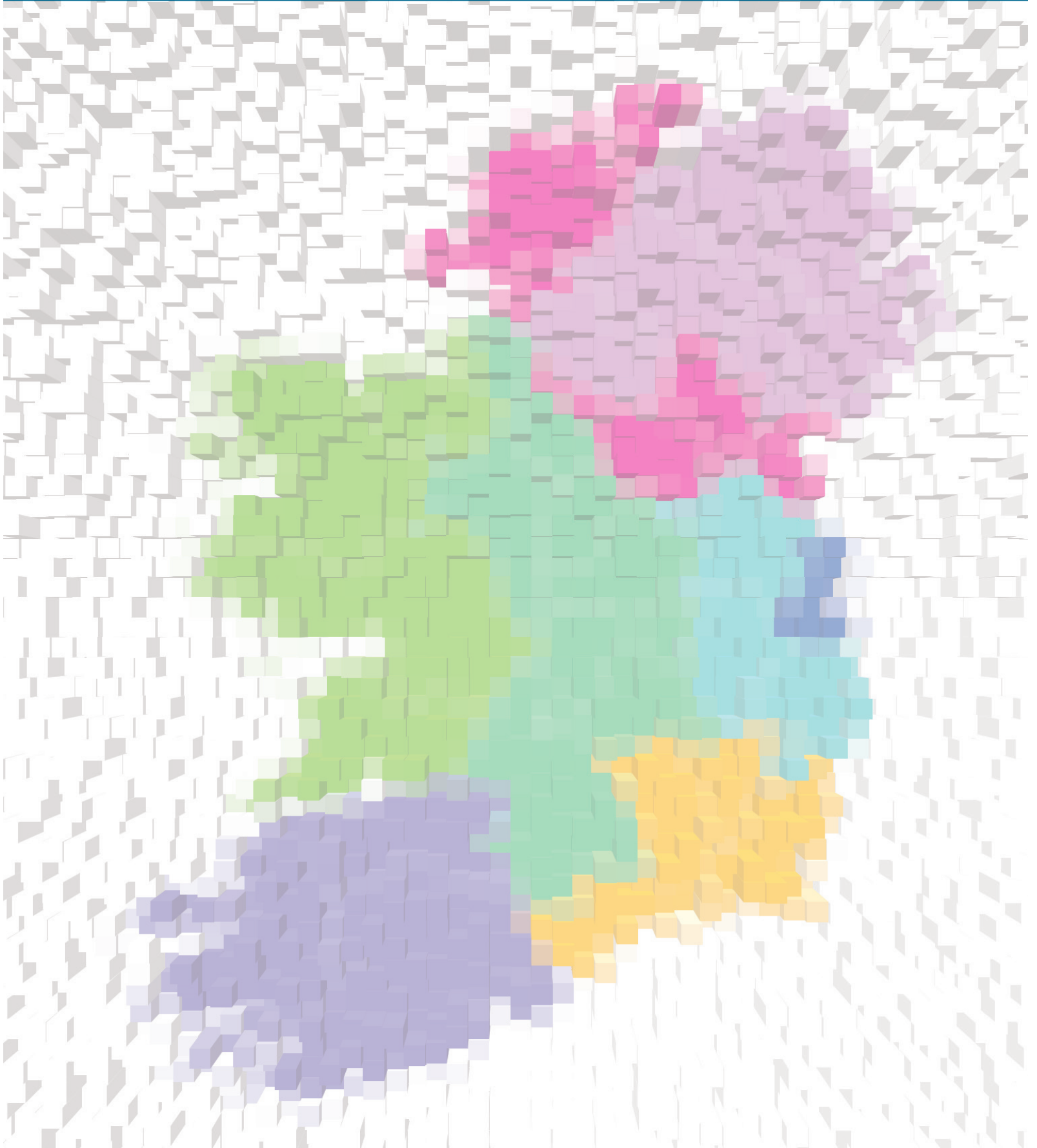




# Pre-Budget Submission 2021

## Bring Life Back to Regional Ireland A Plan for Immediate Action

The Regional Group - An Grúpa Reigiúnach



Minister for Finance  
**Paschal Donohoe TD**

And

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform  
**Michael McGrath TD**

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The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic requires appropriate policy responses from Government. Policy responses must address a pandemic induced recession. Regional areas are disproportionately impacted by this crisis and require targeted interventions for the potential opportunities that exist. Under-investment in infrastructure, particularly in digital and transport, water infrastructure and higher education, will leave some regions significantly challenged in their ability to fully recover.

The National Planning Framework must be fully delivered to support regional investment. Town growth funding should be rolled out to support the revitalisation of town centres. Addressing infrastructure deficits and tapping into the economic potential that remains unused in our regions is essential to advance regional Ireland. The delivery of projects for capital investment in housing, health, agriculture, water, education, defence, regional employment opportunities and sustainability should be prioritised.

Regional supports will encourage people to settle and live in regional towns and villages bringing life back into vacant homes. Broadband and remote working now provide a renewed impetus by taking pressure off the housing, road and water infrastructure in our cities. In doing so, it will significantly enhance the overall national economic recovery effort by improving industry and lives in the regions and taking pressure off cities such as Dublin.

This document is in addition to bilateral pre-budget submissions by the individual Regional Group members.

## **1. Regenerate regional towns and villages**

### Remote Working

- 1.1 Provide a combination of tax relief and supports to incentivise greater levels of home and remote working from hubs in regional towns. Introduce work from home tax incentives to purchase equipment and carry out home alterations.
- 1.2 Designate the Post Office network as a central hub for all offline government services starting with motor tax.

### Rural Living

- 1.3 Extend the Help to Buy and Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Schemes to include the refurbishment cost in addition to the capital cost of the house.
- 1.4 In addition to the Help to Buy scheme provide €15,000 grant for first-time buyers purchasing existing property in a town or village with a significant residential vacancy rate.
- 1.5 Introduce 0% loans for retrofitting homes in addition to retaining the Better Energy Homes Scheme.
- 1.6 Reform inheritance tax rules whereby a favoured niece or nephew is treated in the same manner as a child, where they have no family.



## 2. Rural business

### Connectivity

- 2.1 Accelerate the delivery of the National Broadband Plan to allow rural and regional-based entrepreneurs and enterprises to capitalise on the growing entrepreneurial opportunities such as agritech.
- 2.2 Provide additional financial assistance and training support for public and private sector employers to support employees working from home and digital/coworking hubs in local towns.

### Investment in Business Start-ups to Growth

- 2.3 Increase incentives for business investment - EIS scheme should be widened to cover all businesses in regional and rural Ireland making it easier to attract both entrepreneurs and investors.
- 2.4 Reduce capital gains tax rate from 33% to 20% to encourage succession and transfer of business.
- 2.5 Double funding for Údarás na Gaeltachta, Western Development Commission and regional tourism initiatives.
- 2.6 Expand the definition of Rural Enterprise within the county development plans to support additional business opportunities for rural areas.

## 3. Health

- 3.1 In line with the recommendations of the Health Service Capacity Review, as a base line provide an additional 1,250,000 home help hours, 1,946 home care packages and recruit an additional 384 primary care workers. Increase the Carers' Allowance/Benefit rates and the income disregard for same.
- 3.2 Expand and support the health services provided in community settings and closer to home care for patients. Include diagnostic services in Primary Care Centres as standard.
- 3.3 The disability services budget should be increased by at least €10m to give credence to ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- 3.4 Prioritise urgent capital investment in existing Community Nursing Units (CNUs) to comply with HIQA requirements and support the rollout of Minor Injury Units.

## 4. Education

- 4.1 Enhance financial assistance for apprenticeships and training programmes for young people.
- 4.2 Provide finance to establish and promote additional distance and blended learning programmes.
- 4.3 Extend the free travel scheme to full time third level students for travel to and from their college.

## 5. Agriculture

- 5.1 Introduce a Suckler Cow Environmental Scheme which pays €200 on up to 20 cows to support sustainable suckler beef production based on the Smart Farming Initiative.
- 5.2 Increase the Sheep Welfare Scheme budget to €50m.
- 5.3 Increase the number of places on the Rural Social Scheme by 1,000.
- 5.4 Revise renewable energy supports to ensure access to community grants for renewable energy to diversify and aid energy production by farmers.
- 5.5 Double the Local Improvement Scheme to €20m annually.



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