***Media Release***

***21 April 2021***

**LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICES NOW SUPPORTING OVER 7,500 SMALL BUSINESSES AND 35,000 JOBS ACCORDING TO NEW FIGURES**

* 13,000 small firms approved for Trading Online Vouchers
* 5,585 new jobs created in 2020
* Net jobs loss of 1,494 in same year
* 108% increase in training provided
* 7,500 small businesses employing 35,000 people supported
* A record €22million approved for businesses in financial assistance

Today (21 April), The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Leo Varadkar TD, announced the annual results of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) for 2020 which showed that over 7,500 companies employing over 35,000 people are now supported by the LEOs.

**The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Leo Varadkar TD said:**

*“Our Local Enterprise Offices play a really important role in fostering enterprise across the country. In the face of unprecedented challenges, our LEOs managed to pivot and adapt quickly, to help their network of local businesses endure the crisis of the pandemic. When small businesses needed help more than ever, their virtual door was always open and they were able to train, fund and mentor more businesses last year than ever before.*

*“LEOs are at the very heart of business in communities across the country. The work they do is invaluable and I want to express my particular appreciation to all LEO staff for their professionalism and commitment. I know 2020 was a really difficult year for them and for the businesses they help. The coming months will be similarly busy as we reopen our economy and help businesses get back on their feet. I know LEOs will be to the forefront as we rebuild after the pandemic.”*

Supported by the Government, Local Enterprise Office supported companies created 5,585 new jobs in 2020. Despite the new jobs created, there was a net jobs loss of 1,494 across the LEO portfolio of client companies in what was a challenging year for small businesses.

The Local Enterprise Offices were to the fore in supporting small businesses across the country in 2020, helping thousands to pivot online or adapt their products and services through new Government supports introduced as part of the July Stimulus Package. The LEOs approved 13,091 Trading Online Vouchers to assist businesses get online to trade or improve their existing online offering. This was up over 950% from 1,218 in 2019 and proved to be a vital resource for many businesses helping to reach their customers.

The Local Enterprise Offices are now supporting 35,236 jobs across 7,529 companies. 2020 also saw the successful transition of 133 companies from the Local Enterprise Offices to Enterprise Ireland as they continue to scale and look to international markets.

The LEOs provided significant training and mentoring to small businesses in 2020 to help them navigate the particularly difficult trading environment created by Covid-19 and Brexit. Last year, the Local Enterprise Offices trained over 77,000 entrepreneurs and business representatives, up from 37,000 the year previous. 16,231 completed business mentoring assignments up from 10,756 in 2019.

In 2020, over €22million was approved by Local Enterprise Offices to clients for projects across the year to help improve their businesses in a range of areas. This figure was up from €20million in 2019 and is the largest amount of approved funding by the Local Enterprise Offices to small businesses to date.

**Padraic McElwee, chair of the network of Local Enterprise Offices, said; *“****2020 was a challenging year for everyone, and small businesses were no different. The Local Enterprise Offices were to the fore in trying to help these companies pivot or adapt their businesses to sustain through the issues caused by Covid and Brexit. The figures show the level of support that was given, both financially and through training, mentoring and significantly, the work done in getting small companies online to ensure they could continue to reach their customers. While the challenging environment still exists for many, we have also seen the best of Irish business. Whether that is in their innovations to help in the fight against Covid or companies pivoting their businesses quickly to adapt and survive or seeing that strong sense of local pride with companies helping each other in their own communities and the Local Enterprise Offices have tried to help where we can along the way.”*

**Mark Christal, Regions and Entrepreneurship Division, Enterprise Ireland, said;** “*Despite difficult and challenging times over the last year, the ambition of small companies to scale and expand globally is still thriving and we saw more than 130 companies make the transition into Enterprise Ireland in 2020, with the help of their Local Enterprise Office. Supporting companies with the ambition to export in all regions is at the core of Enterprise Ireland’s ‘Powering the Regions’ strategy. Our collaboration with the Local Enterprise Offices helps to grow smaller businesses in every county in our country and to assist those with the potential for global growth. These businesses are crucial for the creation of jobs as well as ongoing regional and economic development.”*

**AnnMarie Farrelly, Chief Executive of Fingal County Council and Chair of the CCMA Business Committee** *said; “Local Enterprise Offices play a major role in local authority efforts towards supporting and sustaining enterprise and economic development in their areas. The supports and advice LEOs offer make a real difference to the businesses that avail of them, never more than in the last very difficult year. As the figures show, LEOs have put in huge efforts to help businesses to adapt to the challenge of Covid, to move online and sustain their enterprise. It is great to see more businesses reaching out for LEO assistance, and we hope that trend will continue.”*

The Local Enterprise Offices located in the local authorities and funded through Enterprise Ireland support over 7,500 small Irish businesses and entrepreneurs nationwide. Since their establishment in 2014 they have been for the first stop shop for entrepreneurs and small businesses and providing a range of supports including financial, mentoring, training and sector specific expertise to help guide businesses at any stage of their development. For more information on the Local Enterprise Offices go to [www.LocalEnterprise.ie](http://www.LocalEnterprise.ie)

**Ends**

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