

EASTERN & MIDLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

**Initial Public & Stakeholder
Consultation Issues Paper**

November 2017



Contents

1. Context	1
2. Introduction: Our Region	7
3. People and Places	13
4. Economy and Employment	31
5. Environment and Heritage	43
6. Climate and Infrastructure	53
7. Summary of Key Questions	57
8. Where to Next?	59

Foreword Issues Paper

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly was established on 1st January 2015. One of the principal functions of the Assembly is the delivery of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), a new concept in Irish planning where not only the spatial but also the economic factors that go into the future of the region are brought together into one all-encompassing strategy.

The RSES will take a strategic approach over a 12-20 year period to the spatial planning and economic strategy of our region to create a better region and a brighter future for our citizens.

From the outset, the Assembly Members and my Executive Team have worked closely to identify and engage with all the many elements that go towards making up our diverse region. We have now arrived at an exciting and very important time. With the upcoming publication of the National Planning Framework, the opportunity is being presented to us to fill in the finer regional detail that will go towards achieving that plan's objectives while allowing the region to develop and deliver on its own unique specific needs and to realise its huge potential over the coming decade.

This issues paper sets out the broad range of factors that must be considered and addressed to deliver an effective regional strategy. While the obvious advantage of having Dublin, an international capital city, within the region is clear, this brings other challenges as to how we maximise this advantage to the benefit of the entire region. Having a young well-educated population will bring energy and innovation to a growing workforce. We also need to plan for a growing ageing population with all the needs that must be met to ensure their quality of life into the future.

Maximising our marine and agriculture assets, addressing our climate change obligations and protecting our heritage and environment will all be included in the strategy. The pressures that commuting places on families and establishing sustainable communities in our region will be important as will addressing how the benefits of the economic recovery can be extended to all parts of the region. Ensuring the best use of current infrastructure and examining transportation solutions and opportunities will further inform the process.

This is the first step in bringing together all the issues and identifying how they fit in the strategy. Your input is essential to the process. I look forward to an extensive engagement and invite as many of you as possible to help and engage in the strategy making process by offering your opinions.

Jim Conway



1. Context

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), which was established in January 2015, is part of the regional tier of governance in Ireland.

It is primarily focused on the preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), integration of Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), management of EU Operational Programmes, EU project participation, implementation of national economic policy, and working with the National Oversight and Audit Commission.

The region covers nine counties containing twelve local authorities namely – Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Fingal, South Dublin and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils along with Dublin City Council. The region includes 3 sub-regions or Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs), namely the Midland, Eastern and Dublin, see Figure 1.1. The 38 strong membership of the Assembly is predominantly nominated by these local authorities to represent the region as policy makers to create a better region and a brighter future for its citizens.

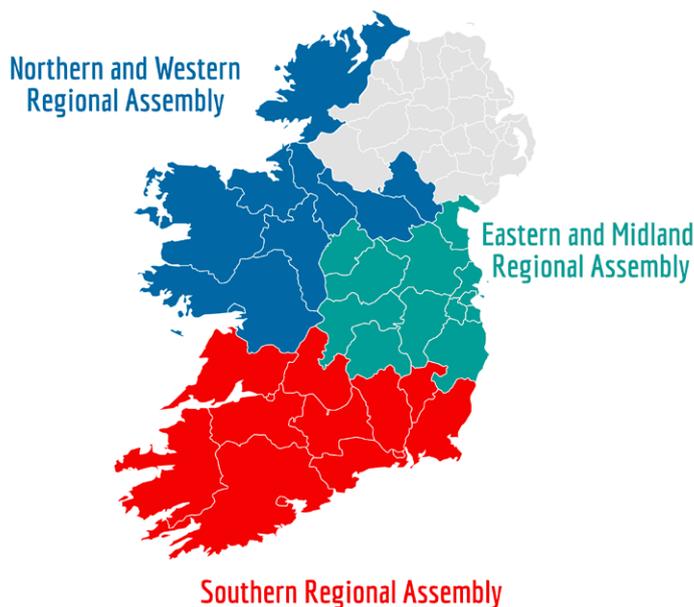


Figure 1.1 The Regional Assemblies and the Eastern and Midland Region

Purpose of this Issue Paper

This issues paper is an informative document designed to prompt the consultation period around the initiation of the statutory process of making a RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region.

The principal statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of the emerging National Planning Framework (NPF) - Ireland 2040 Our Plan, and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the regions. The RSES is required under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) to address Employment, Retail, Housing, Transport, Water services, Energy and communications, Waste management, Education, health, sports and community facilities, Environment and heritage, Landscape, Sustainable development and climate change

Given the importance of consultation as part of the plan making process this document is intended to highlight the key issues relevant to the region in order to formulate our regional strategy. This issues paper demonstrates the Assembly's approach to an evidence based policy making approach. The Assembly considers that this approach can apply to the cycle of plan making and is as important for monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation as it is for policy formulation.

This paper presents a context for the RSES, an evidence based profile of the region and it is thematically presented with the four key themes of People and Places, Economy and Employment, Environment and Heritage, and Infrastructure and Climate Change. It is designed to inform the consultation process and assist members of the public and all interested parties and stakeholders in considering a submission to the process to inform our Assembly in the making of the strategy.



Spatial Planning Policy

Planning policy in Ireland is entering a new phase, the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government has just published a draft of the NPF - Ireland 2040, which is the long-term strategic planning framework for our country's future growth and prosperity over the next 20+ years.

The NPF replaces the former National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and its related documents, such as the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) 2010. Ireland 2040 - Our Plan will guide national, regional and local planning opportunities throughout our Republic together with investment decisions for at least the next two decades, see Figure 1.2.

Finalisation of the NPF later this year alongside the 10-year National Investment Plan, will essentially put together one plan to guide strategic development and infrastructure investment at national level.

The regional tier of governance in Ireland sits in the middle of the planning hierarchy and the policy making at this level has to be consistent with the NPF, as does that at a local level with the RSES, see Figure 1.3 which shows the Spatial Planning Hierarchy in Ireland. However, the RSES process will be a coproduction and there is an opportunity for a bottom-up influence from the city / county level in the formulation of the strategy.

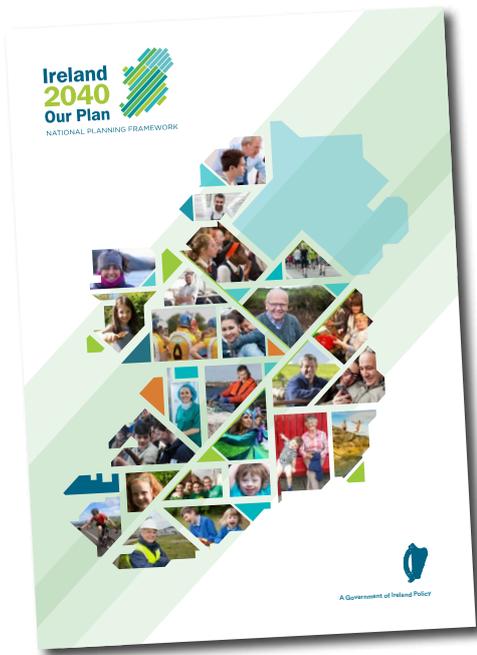


Fig 1.2 Ireland 2040 Our Plan - Draft National Planning Framework

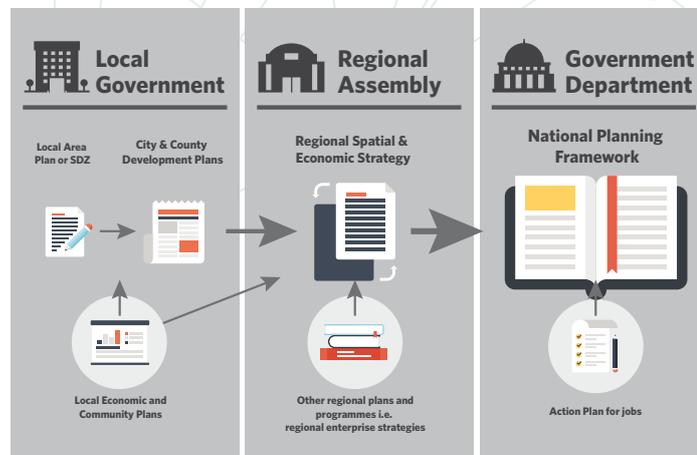


Fig 1.3 The Spatial Planning Hierarchy in Ireland

What is a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

A RSES is a strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses. At this strategic level it puts in place policies and recommendations that will better manage regional planning and economic development throughout the region.

This strategic planning process represents a core function of the regional assemblies in Ireland. The RSES should seek to ensure that the needs of the regions' citizens such as access to employment opportunities and services, ease of travel and overall well-being are met.

This will minimise negative impact on the environment; grow healthy and connected communities; and maximise economic impact. Issues like climate change, flooding, water services, waste management and regional biodiversity are all high on our policy agenda.

Regional planning now incorporates:

- A more prominent regional role in economic development.
- A role in linking local economic development from the bottom-up through LECPs with regional and national planning.
- A role in coordination of local authorities at regional scale.

The RSES will be the follow-on strategies to the current RPGs. These provide strategic policy and recommendations at a regional level with which both county and city development plans have to be consistent in policy making. There are three RPGs currently operational in the region - the Border (due to Louth), the Midland and the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) RPGs, 2010-2022.

The RSES will distribute future population growth and development across the region in a balanced and equitable manner and with a much greater focus on economic development and potential. Our priorities, within the hierarchical planning system, are to make sure that the decisions we make take full account of: public consultation and feedback; are rooted in sound evidence and best practice; and enhance the environment and wellbeing of our citizens.

The RSES will:

- take account of national policy - the NPF - Ireland 2040 and future national planning frameworks,
- support and reflect the economic policies and objectives of Government and link with spatial planning objectives,
- consider the qualities, population size, service offering and location of our towns and cities, and
- support balanced economic development, building on the individual strengths of the 3 Irish regions and our shared interests (including our links with Northern Ireland).

This greater economic focus will:

- strengthen links between planning policy and economic trends and realities on the ground, and
- identify regional attributes that are important to improved economic performance such as physical infrastructure and services, community development facilities, the general quality of the environment and other assets and amenities.

New Issues for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

Since the adoption of the RPGs in Ireland in 2010 there have been significant changes to the spatial planning policy arena. Under the reforms of local government the previous regional authorities and assemblies were abolished and the functions amalgamated, and in the case of the planning function enhanced, to form the three new regional assemblies.

The current RPGs have been a key aspect in the Government's programme to enable Ireland's planning system to play an important role in the national economic recovery. This has been achieved by delivering a planned planning system where plans at national, regional and local levels are effectively aligned, that benefit the economy and environment as a whole and provide every citizen with an opportunity for an improved quality of life.

New planning legislation, under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) allows for RSEs to replace the existing RPGs. This has enhanced the regional planning function by including a significant economic strategy to be combined with the spatial strategy to foster regional growth. The economic element will establish a broad framework for subsequent integrated local authority policy development and associated action; and it will outline the role of other relevant Government Departments and agencies. Local authorities, departments and agencies will participate in the formation of the new strategies and adhere to them in their ongoing functions. As a consequence the role of the local authority in economic development and enterprise support and promotion will be strengthened and clarified.

The Assembly faces considerable future challenges, the most pressing of these being climate related disruption. These challenges, including more frequent and intense flooding, extreme weather events and associated storm damage, pose a significant threat to the economic and social well-being of the region. The RSES will enable the Assembly to comprehensively address these future challenges, by coordinating spatial, infrastructural and economic planning and allowing the region to transition to a resilient, low-carbon economy. In addition to mitigating the adverse effects of climate change, this coordinated planning will enable Ireland to fulfil its international obligations, including under the Paris Climate Agreement.

The National Transport Authority's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016–2035 was adopted last year. This sets out an integrated long-term strategy for the GDA and includes new public transport proposals such as DART and Luas expansion and a new Metro route. There is a statutory requirement for the RSES to be consistent with the Transport Strategy and to be considered in the formulation of the RSES. The NTA will also have to review their transport strategy on foot of the adoption of the RSES.

Under the current RPGs for the Greater Dublin Area a Retail Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2008-2016 is in use, this has informed retail policy at a development plan level, and assisted in decision making of retail development across the GDA. This document set out a co-ordinated and sustainable approach to the assessment and provision of retail within the GDA, and was prepared in heightened economic times. Given that the policy framework that informs this strategy has evolved and following with the adoption of a new RSES a full review of this strategy will be required.



Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment of the RSES is required under the EU SEA Directive 2001/42/EC. The SEA Directive was transposed into Irish law under the 'Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004-2011'.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a statutory formal process, concerned with the environmental impacts of implementing the RSES. It is a process that aims to ensure that any potential for significant environmental effects are identified, considered and taken into account prior to the adoption of the plan. It is a separate parallel process carried out in tandem with the preparation of the RSES.

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) aims to create a network of protected wildlife sites in Europe through the designation of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, collectively known as Natura 2000 sites. It is a requirement of the Directive and legislation to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (Natura Impact Report) on any plan or project that is likely to have a significant effect on the conservation status of a site. The RSES will have to be screened to ascertain whether it has any significant impact on any Natura 2000 site. Whilst the AA is a statutorily separate process to the SEA it is a parallel process and, as such, the outcomes of the AA will feed into and inform the SEA process.

The EU Floods Directive and the "Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities" (DoEHLG/OPW, 2009) set out the requirement for a plan to be accompanied by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. The Assembly will carry out a Regional Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the policies and objectives of the RSES as part of the SEA process.



2. Introduction: Our Region

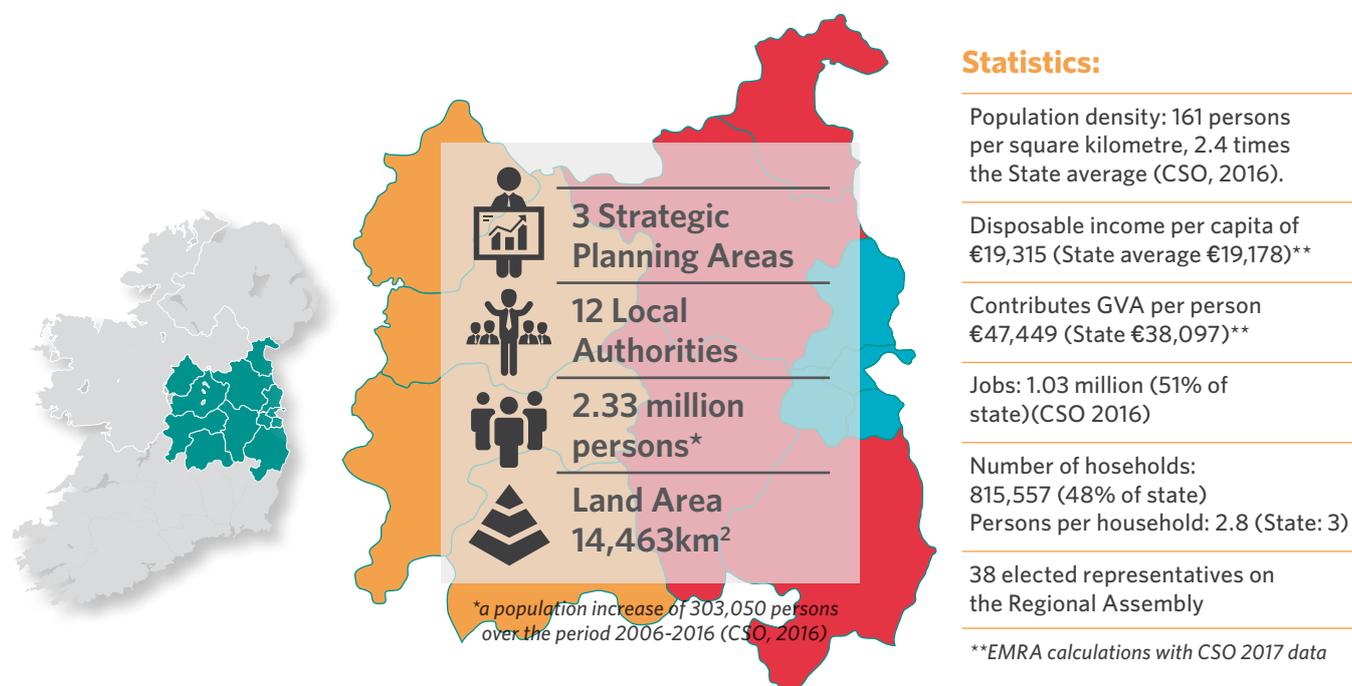


Figure 2.1 Our Region: Vital Statistics, CSO 2016

EMRA is one of the three Regional Assemblies in Ireland. The region covers nearly 14,500 square kilometres, which is the smallest in terms of land area but it accommodates almost half of the nation's 4.6 million inhabitants with nearly 816,000 households and over 1 million jobs, see Figure 2.1. From 2006 to 2016 the region grew by 15%, an increase of over 300,000 people, which exceeded the state average of 12% growth over the same period. Laois and Fingal were the fastest growing counties, with significant growth rates of 26% and 23% respectively.

The main settlement is the capital city of Dublin, which at 1.2 million population is home to nearly 1 in 4 of Ireland's people or more than two and a half times the combined population of Ireland's four other cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. Dublin is the main global gateway to Ireland, with Dublin airport one of the fastest growing in Europe and continued growth in ferry passengers and international exports through Dublin Port. Dublin is supported regionally by key strategic county towns and an extensive rural hinterland.

The region is the economic engine of the state and producing half of everything that is produced in the state and hosting half of the national employment. There are over one and a half million people of working age in the region, a key human capital asset with nearly 1 in 3 of the population in Dublin alone between 25 and 44 years.

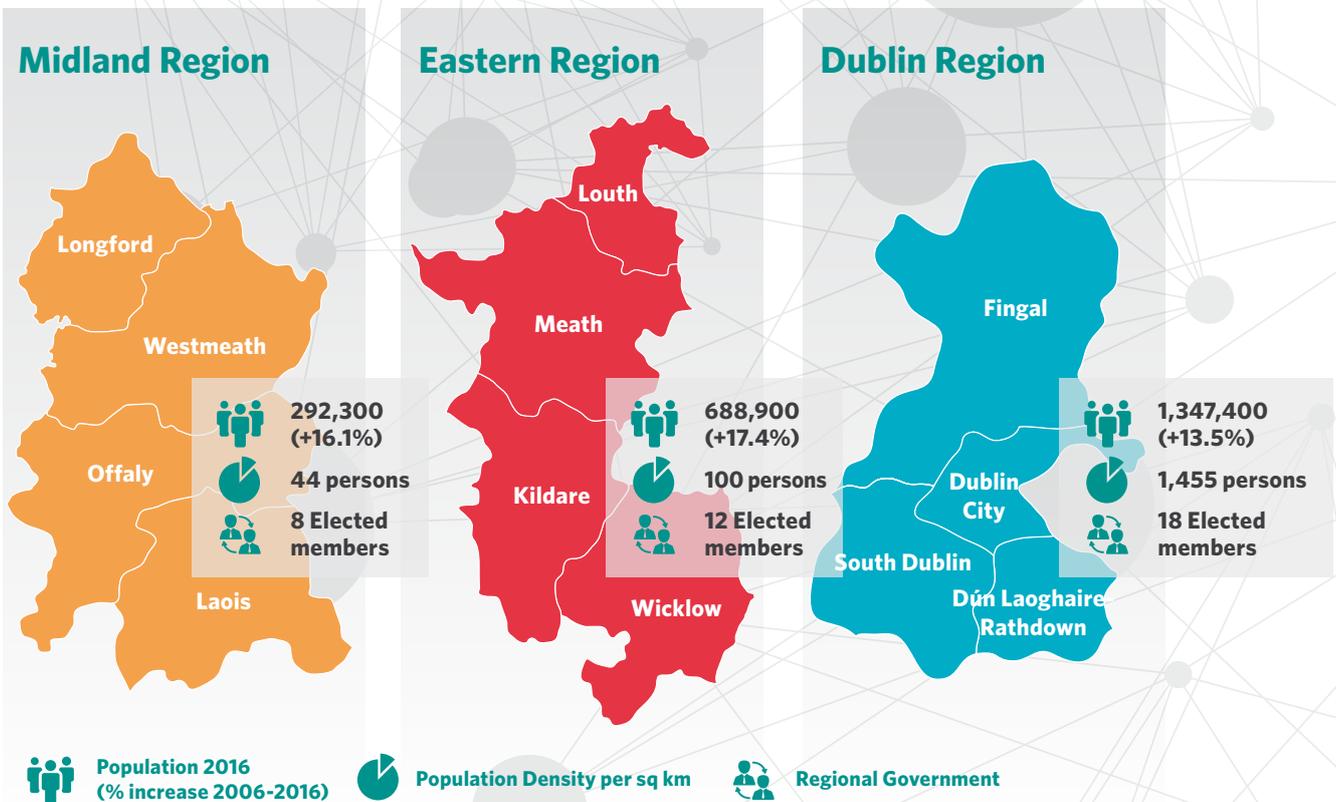
Dublin has been highly successful in attracting Foreign Direct Investment and acts as an international hub for multinationals and large enterprises providing high value jobs in ICT, financial and business services. Local enterprise and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) provide vital employment across the region, with the Eastern and Midland counties having the highest share of micro-enterprises. This extends from the horticultural heartland of north Dublin to agri-business in the East and Midland counties, with regional specialisations such as the equine, food and creative industries. The region has strong clusters of universities and research centres to support innovation with a robust enterprise base of traditional and emerging sectors.

The region is home to areas of rich heritage and immense natural beauty that support a varied tourism and recreation offering and are part of our unique cultural identity. The eastern seaboard has more than 270km of coastline from Carlingford Lough, Dublin Bay biosphere and the Wicklow Mountains to Kilmichael Point. Inland waterways from the Royal and Grand Canals to the Lower Shannon-Erne Lakeland are a key focus for water based tourism, with a varied heritage offering that includes nine Irish Heritage Towns, world renowned historic sites from Dublin Castle to the UNESCO World Heritage site at Bru na Boinne and medieval monasteries of Clonmacnoise and Glendalough.

Administrative boundaries

In the preparation of the RSES the Assembly has to take into consideration a sub-regional planning remit through the SPA Committees, each of which incorporates four local authorities in the Dublin, Eastern and Midland sub regions, see Figure 2.2 which shows a summary of vital statistics for each SPA.

Figure 2.2 Our Strategic Planning Areas: Vital Statistics, CSO 2016

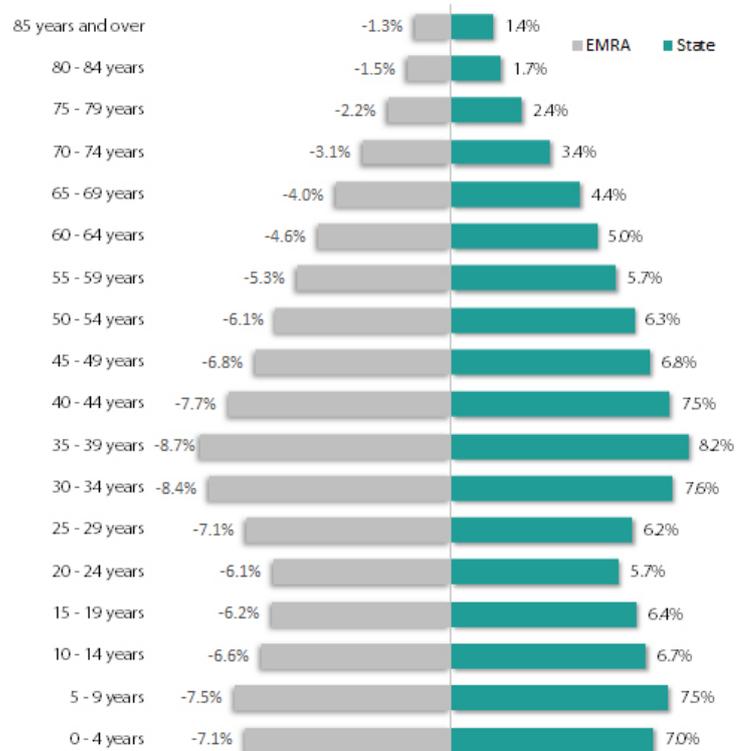
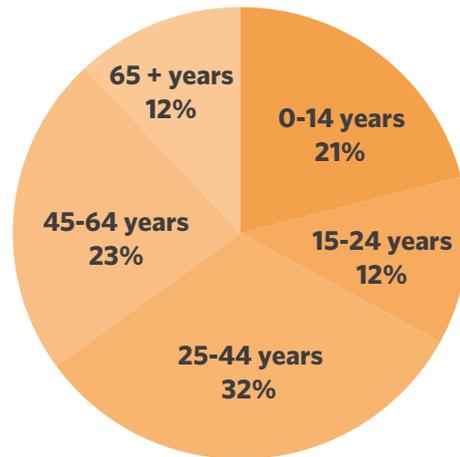


A young and growing region

The region is home to nearly half the country's population, and to a highly skilled, multi-cultural and multi-lingual workforce.

The region contains some of the fastest growing communities in the country, which increases demand for housing, infrastructure and local services. Planning for better places and sustainable economic growth requires an understanding of the demographic trends in the region, the skills base and the needs of citizens and communities. From family friendly living in Dublin and its hinterland, to catering for relatively older populations in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and Longford we will plan to meet future needs of our citizens based on the best available evidence, see Figures 2.3 for breakdown of the region's age structure.

EMRA Age Profile (CSO, 2016)



2.3 Age structure - EMRA and State, CSO 2016

A diverse region

While the dominant factor driving population growth is natural increase as opposed to the high migration rates experienced during previous intercensal periods, there has been a recent return to inward migration, where more people arrived than migrated.

It is important to understand the spatial distribution of migration, which feeds demand for social and health services, amenities, housing and infrastructure. For more information on our regional profile and evidence baseline see www.emra.ie/maps

The region has more than half of the states non-Irish national population, at nearly 300,000 people which is 13% of the regional population. However, the number of non-Irish nationals fell for the first time in the last intercensal period, partly due to the increase in dual citizenship, as more people become Irish citizens. See Figure 2.5 which shows the percentage of non-Irish nationals across the region.

Meath has the lowest percentage of people in the state, at 35% who were born in that county, with half of all residents in Meath born elsewhere in Ireland. In general, the commuter belt counties of Meath, Kildare and Wicklow had the highest percentage of residents that were not born in the county. One third of the usual residents in Dublin were born outside the county and more than 3 out of 5 of these were born abroad.

Longford has the second highest migration rate behind Dublin. The county has the highest rate of Irish travellers across the country. This will require special consideration of the requisite long-term planning and service provision given that the normal assumptions associated with increased net migration such as good economic conditions, wealth and opportunities are not as apparent here as in other locations.

In terms of nationality, in the counties of Dublin city, Fingal and Longford 1 in 6 of their populations are non-Irish nationals. There are higher rates in some regional towns with up to 1 in 4 people in Longford and more than 1 in 5 in Portlaoise and Athlone are non-Irish nationals. The largest numbers are Polish, with high numbers of Lithuanian, UK and other EU nationals. People from the rest of the world, mainly Africa and Asia are mostly concentrated in Dublin.

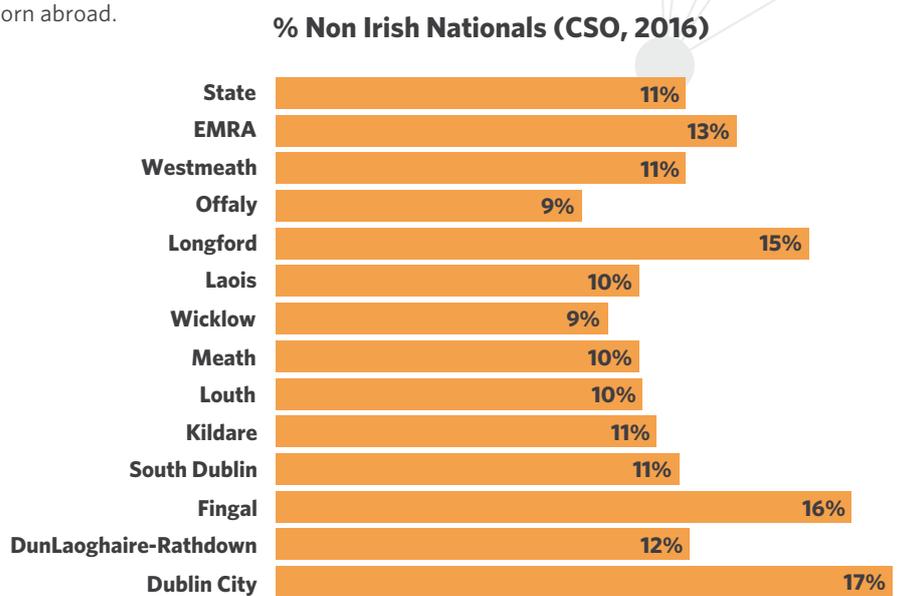


Figure 2.5 Non-Irish Nationals, CSO 2016

Key Questions:

- What should our region look like in 2030?
- How will demographic trends change our society?
- What are the key services people will need?
- How do we plan for an age friendly society?
- How can we ensure a social inclusive society

It is important to understand the demographic profile of our population if we are to plan for the long term needs of our growing population with different types of social, education and health services, housing need, amenities, transport, skills and employment needs. See the EMRA Socio Economic Profile at www.emra.ie/maps for further information on age profile, migration, cost of living, educational attainment, labour force participation rates and changes in travel patterns.



3. People & Places

Developing a Growth and Settlement Pattern for the region

At the core of the RSES will be the consideration of a settlement hierarchy for the region, which sets out the key locations for population and employment growth, coupled with investment in infrastructure and services to meet those growth needs.

In determining the 'optimum' spatial hierarchy, the RSES must consider the parameters as defined by the Draft NPF - Ireland 2040, see Figure 3.1 in light of a review of current policy as set out in the RPGs, and what the latest research and evidence tells us about the region as it is today.

Figure 3.1 Parameters of Growth- Draft National Planning Framework 'Ireland 2040'

Total Additional Population in 2040 = 475,000- 500,000 people	
Dublin City = 265,000 people	Remaining EMRA Region = 235,000 people
Towns >10,000 population = 20-25% total growth until 2040	
Towns/Areas <10,000 population = 15% total growth until 2040	
330,000 additional Jobs= location of jobs generally aligned to population growth	
Dublin City = 50% of new homes on infill/brownfield sites.	Remaining EMRA Region = 30% of new homes on infill/brownfield sites.

The draft NPF has set out targets for rates of population growth for Dublin (up to 23%), large towns (up to 25%) and smaller settlements (up to 15%), within an overall population growth allocation of 500,000 for the region. This does not mean that individual settlements cannot develop beyond the generally targeted rate of growth, but that all places can't, as overall growth within the region must be consistent with NPF policy.

The draft NPF outlines key considerations for growth in large towns:

- Whether a settlement is located inside or outside the Dublin City-Region catchment.
- The scale of employment provision and net commuting flows.
- Accessibility and influence in a regional context.
- The extent of local services provision i.e. administration; education- particularly third level; health; leisure and retail.
- Particular sub-regional interdependencies, for example, where a settlement may be located in relation to a number of nearby settlements.
- Local ambition, initiative and commitment to achieve compact growth.

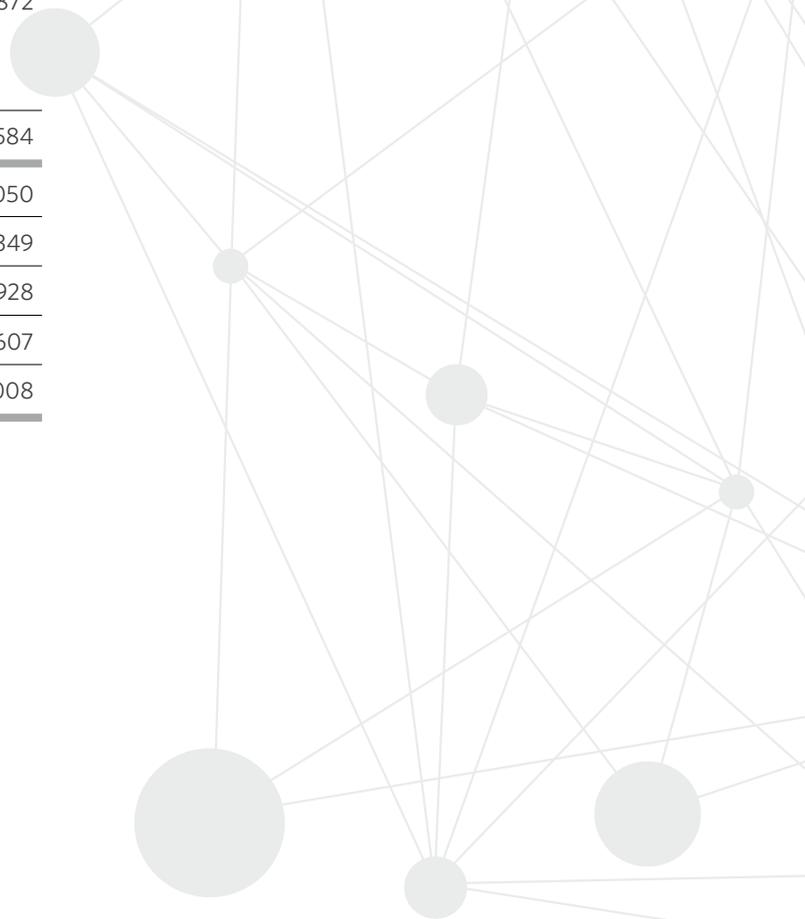
The draft NPF defines 'large' towns as those CSO defined settlements with populations over 10,000 people. Our region is highly urbanised, with more than 7 out of 10 people who are living in Dublin or one of twenty-three settlements in the region with population between 10,000 to 41,000 population range, however the spatial distribution of these settlements is focused on the eastern part of the region and the low density of urban centres above 10,000 population in the rest of the region is reflective of the traditional rural nature of the Midlands and areas that are not within the Dublin city region catchment, Figures 3.2 and 3.3 refer.

CSO towns	SPA	LA	CSO 2016
Dublin city and suburbs	Dublin	MultiCounty	1173179
Swords	Dublin	Fingal	39248
Balbriggan	Dublin	Fingal	21722
Malahide	Dublin	Fingal	16550
Skerries	Dublin	Fingal	10043
Drogheda	Eastern	MultiCounty	40956
Dundalk	Eastern	Louth	39004
Bray	Eastern	MultiCounty	32600
Navan	Eastern	Meath	30173
Newbridge	Eastern	Kildare	22742
Naas	Eastern	Kildare	21393
Celbridge	Eastern	Kildare	20288
Greystones-Delgany	Eastern	Wicklow	18140
Leixlip	Eastern	Kildare	15504
Maynooth	Eastern	Kildare	14585
Arklow	Eastern	Wicklow	13163
Ashbourne	Eastern	Meath	12679
Laytown-Bettystown-Mornington-Donacarney	Eastern	Meath	11872
Wicklow	Eastern	Wicklow	10584
Portlaoise	Midland	Laois	22050
Athlone	Midland	MultiCounty	21349
Mullingar	Midland	Westmeath	20928
Tullamore	Midland	Offaly	14607
Longford	Midland	Longford	10008

Figure 3.3 Population of Large Towns over 10,000 people (CSO, 2016)

Dublin leads the settlement hierarchy for not only the region but also the state, with no other comparable settlement within the nation's urban system. It is critically important that Dublin's growth is positively managed to ensure the region and country's sustainable growth and competitiveness. As Dublin is competing with other global cities, an artificial constraint on Dublin's growth would not necessarily be to the benefit of other Irish city regions, but would compound increasing pressures on infrastructure, transport and housing and reduce competitiveness in the capital city and region

While settlements with larger populations generally have a greater range of functions and provision of services, population size is not the sole determinant of a settlement's functional role or in the consideration of strategic regional significance. Some towns with a large population base located within the catchment of Dublin have emerged mainly as commuting towns, with a level of function significantly lower than their population base. Conversely some towns, have a level of function higher than their population base and play a key regional role. Dundalk, Longford, Tullamore and Mullingar, for example, support more local jobs than resident workers, indicating that they play a key economic role in supporting employment in their hinterlands.



It will be important to ensure that growth and settlement strategy is sustainable, in that it makes the most effective use of infrastructure and resources, and that it doesn't impact on the ability of an area to mitigate and adapt to climate change. That it supports accessibility, inclusivity and a good quality of life in the built environment, whilst protecting the supporting natural environment. Key issues to be considered include proximity to employment, including smaller clusters of employment, major public transport and cycle corridors, patterns of housing affordability, infrastructural carrying capacity and current and future environmental risk.

It is important to learn from the lessons of the previous National Spatial Strategy. While planning can have designated growth centres, it can be external factors such as demographic shifts or local conditions and market forces, which drive actual growth patterns. Over the last ten years in the region key factors in the location of residential development to meet the needs of an extra 300,000 people have included proximity to employment and housing affordability.

The current RPGs for the GDA 2010-2022, sets out a settlement hierarchy that encourages consolidation through increased densities in the Dublin metropolitan area and in identified key settlements in the surrounding hinterland, setting the policy framework for the seven local authorities in the GDA. The current RPGs for the Border region, which included Louth were focussed on encouraging growth in the Dundalk Gateway while the RPGs for the Midlands identified the Linked Gateway of Athlone-Tullamore-Mullingar as a primary growth driver for the counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

Going forward the RSES must now consider the potential of settlements and their surrounding regional catchments in determining future targeted patterns of growth, as part of an extended region.

Key questions:

- How do we ensure population, housing and employment targets align with the sustainable growth needs of the region?
- Where are the key strategic locations for population and employment growth?
- How do we ensure the most effective use of infrastructure and resources?
- How can we encourage better alignment between population growth, location of residential development and employment?
- How do we ensure that every place is able to meet its potential?



Urban structure

The Draft NPF, identifies an urban structure for the Dublin city region, with reference to the EU/OECD definition of ‘functional urban areas’ as follows:

- i. Dublin city and suburbs; The CSO defines Dublin city and suburbs as the built-up area of Dublin, which extends beyond the M50 ring road encompassing the large urban areas of Blanchardstown, Tallaght, Lucan and Clondalkin and across Dublin Bay from the coastal villages of Howth to Shankill. In terms of population it accounts for 50.4% of the EMRA’s population with a total population of 1,173,179 (Census 2016).
- ii. The city region and rural commuter catchment around Dublin, defined as all Electoral Districts (EDs) where at least 15% of their employed residents are working in the Dublin Metropolitan Area. By this definition the influence of Dublin now covers much of the region extending into parts of the Midlands, into Louth to the north and beyond the region south into Wexford. The Hinterland includes key county and market towns such as Drogheda, Balbriggan, Navan, Naas, Newbridge, Wicklow and Arklow and is home to 1.96 million or more than 4 out of every 5 people in EMRA living in the city region.

See Figure 3.4 setting out the functional urban ‘hinterland’ where at least 15% of the workforce is within the Dublin Metropolitan Area, based on Place of Work (POWCAR) 2016 census data.

There is also established spatial policy in the current RPGs, set out in Figure 3.5 which divides the GDA (Dublin, Meath Kildare and Wicklow) into two parts;

- i. The Dublin Metropolitan area (DMA) includes the continuous built up city area and the settlements of Swords, Malahide, Maynooth, Leixlip, Celbridge, Bray and Greystones, within a polycentric metropolitan area, it is home to 1.4 million or 3 out of 5 people in the region.
- ii. The hinterland which includes the peri-urban and rural areas of the GDA.

RPG policy is to encourage consolidation of economic and housing growth through increased densities in the metropolitan area and in identified key settlements centres in the hinterland.

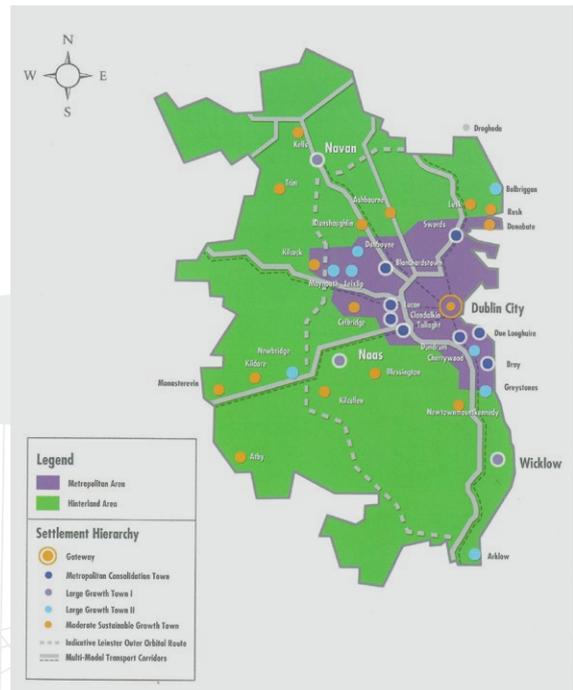


Fig 3.5 Settlement Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), Regional Planning Guidelines for the GDA 2010-2022

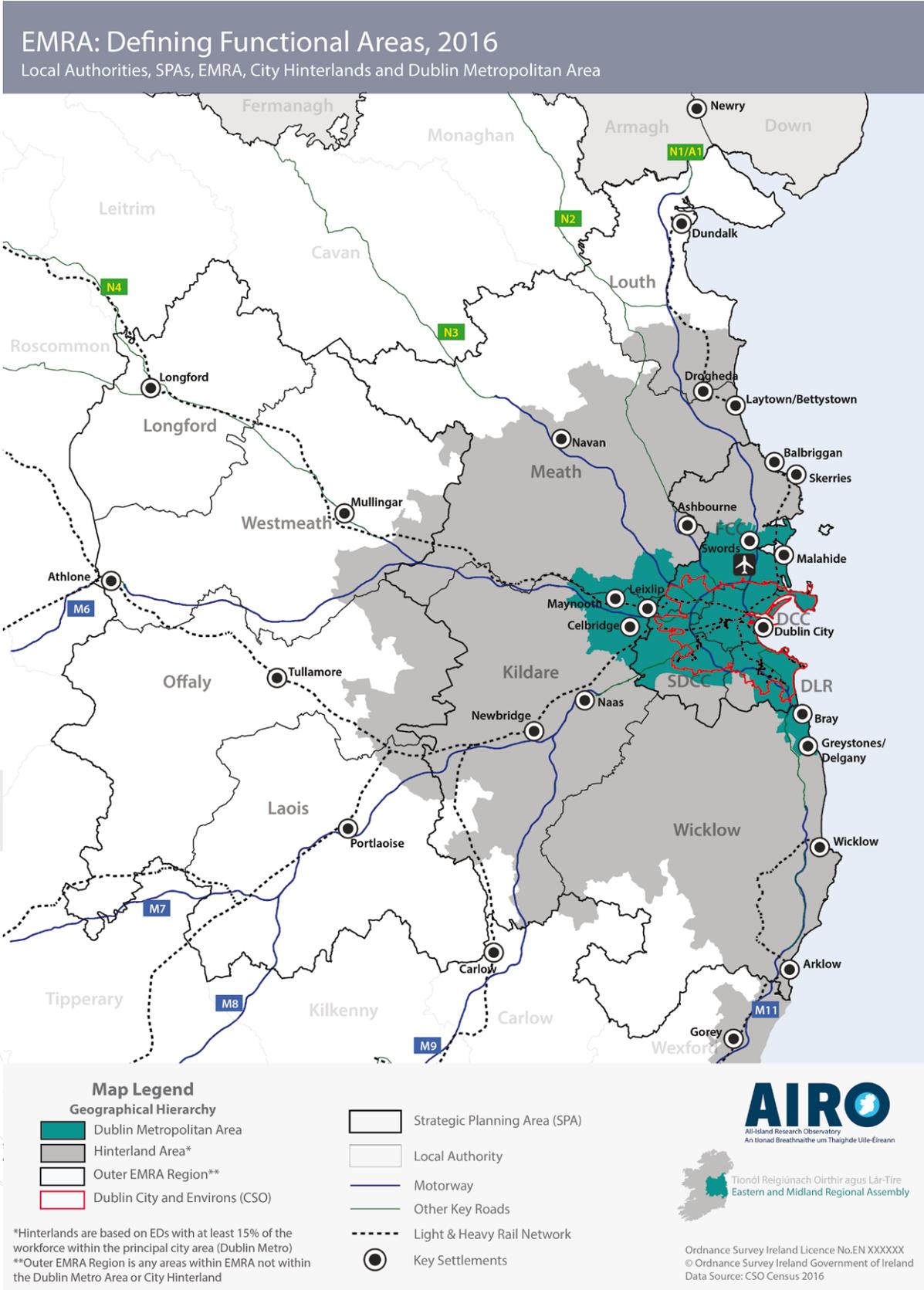


Figure 3.4 Urban Structure - Defining Functional Areas, CSO 2016

The draft NPF sets out a policy framework to direct at least half of region's allocated 500,000 population growth until 2040 into Dublin city and suburbs (up to 265,000 population) and an overall two thirds of future growth into the large urban areas of Dublin city and the large towns over 10,000 population.

The RSES must now consider the optimum policy approach to guide the distribution of growth that would allow for the sustainable development and continued success of certain key strategic urban growth settlements in the region.

The draft NPF introduces a strategic focus on the metropolitan cities with Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) for the five cities in Ireland. Accordingly, in tandem with and as part of the RSES process, arrangements will be put in place to enable the preparation of five co-ordinated MASPs for the Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford Metropolitan areas.

In line with the RSEs, the MASPs will be provided with statutory underpinning to act as twelve-year strategic planning and investment frameworks for the city metropolitan areas addressing high-level and long-term strategic development issues including;

- Physical development patterns and strategic growth areas.
- Strategic infrastructure, particularly in the transportation and water services areas.
- Large scale regeneration and the location of housing and employment.
- Metropolitan scale amenities such as regional parks and walking and cycling networks.

MASPs will align with and inform national-level sectoral investment plans to guide and coordinate investment within the metropolitan areas, coordinating land use planning and strategic infrastructure.

Key questions:

- Does the consideration of functional urban areas have benefits for the long term cohesive planning of metropolitan areas, where the influence of city regions has extended beyond administrative boundaries?
- How will the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans deliver on planning for metropolitan Dublin?
- How can we best encourage higher densities and consolidation in urban areas and prevent further overdevelopment and sprawl in the hinterland?
- Where should higher densities be directed to best ensure the sustainable integration of housing, land use and sustainable modes of transportation to meet future growth needs?
- How can urban planning best support the transition to a circular and low-carbon economy?

Rural communities

The region is the most densely populated region in the state, at 161 persons per square kilometre or 2.4 times the national average. However, densities are highly concentrated in urban cores and most of the region is characterised by dispersed settlement patterns well under 150 persons per square kilometre, which would be considered to be predominantly rural in character.

Strong rural-urban interdependencies are a feature of the region, with positive correlations between rural economic performance and accessibility to viable urban centres, the national road network and rural transport options. Given that towns and cities are now the primary locations for employment, weak rural-urban links are likely to contribute to population decline in remote and inaccessible areas, particularly in the working age demographic, with the exception of some areas such as tourism hotspots.

The draft NPF allows for selective rates of growth of up to 25% for large towns and up to 15% growth for all other towns and villages. A smart growth fund and active land management measures are proposed to encourage consolidation of 30% of new residential development on infill or brownfield sites in urban settlements of all scales, including small towns and villages.

The presence of rural 'one-off' housing is a feature of the region, particularly within the influence of Dublin. The draft NPF identifies a distinction between rural areas located within the commuter catchments of cities and 'large' towns, and rural areas located outside those commuter catchments. Those parts of the region outside the Dublin catchment are home to 372,000 people and cover an extensive rural area supported by a network of large towns such as Dundalk, Athlone, Mullingar, Portlaoise, Tullamore and Longford, each of which have their own catchments, yet to be defined.

It is likely that much of the region will be located within the urban hinterlands of Dublin and the large towns, and therefore deemed by the draft NPF to be an area under urban influence, where the provision of single housing in the countryside will be based on the consideration of certain parameters.

Dispersed settlement patterns present challenges in relation to service provision, accessibility and rural isolation. There is a need to better understand the reasons why people choose to live in rural areas. Whether people are unable to reside in urban areas due to a lack of supply of affordable and suitable housing or where this may be due to a preference for rural living or strong links to the area. It will be crucial to promote activity and economic opportunity in towns that support local and surrounding rural populations and to ensure good quality public transport and road links to Dublin and to other regional towns.

Key Questions:

- How can we ensure the optimum spatial distribution of growth across the region to ensure the viability of a range of settlements, from county towns to small towns and rural villages?
- Which settlements have the infrastructure and transport capacity and potential to become vibrant centres with a range of functions and services to serve their local and surrounding catchments?
- How do we ensure rural communities can best meet their potential in a sustainable manner?
- What measures need to be in place to facilitate rural housing while protecting rural areas from urban generated sprawl?

Population

The total population of the region in 2016 was 2.33 million, the Dublin SPA has the largest share with 58% of this population, while 30% of people live in the Eastern SPA and 12.5% in the Midland SPA. For a full population breakdown of the region see Figure 3.6.

Population growth in the region in the last census period between 2011 and 2016 was the slowest in 20 years, an increase of 5.4% compared to the State average of 3.8%, largely due to outward migration during the economic recession. For this reason, we look at 10-year population growth for a more balanced picture, which includes natural increase where the number of births is greater than that of deaths.

From 2006 to 2016 the region grew by 15% - an increase of over 300,000 people - exceeding the state average of 12% growth over the same period, with significant growth rates of up to 26% in Laois and 23% in Fingal, that will require adequate provision of supporting infrastructure, services and amenities to meet rapidly growing communities. The counties of Kildare, Meath and Longford also experienced significant growth (>19%), while rates of growth in Dublin City and Offaly were less than the state average. See figures 3.7 and 3.8 for more information on ten-year population growth across the region.

In line with a prevailing state-wide trend of urbanisation, the region saw the continued increase in the share of population residing in urban areas. Only the Midland counties recorded a higher rural share of population, although that rate is declining. There was rural depopulation in more peripheral areas, in Offaly and towards the west and north of the region.

Alongside this however, is a trend for counter urbanisation with strong growth in the peri-urban and rural areas surrounding Dublin, and the decline of population in urban cores including Dublin city. Whilst several factors contributed to the increasing expansion of the Dublin hinterland, the chronic undersupply of appropriate and affordable housing in Dublin linked to infrastructure deficiencies has emerged as a principal factor.

The current RPGs for the GDA, Border and Midland regions, set out population targets for the 12 counties in the Eastern and Midlands region, adding to 2.4 million by 2016 and 2.6 million by 2022. The Draft NPF sets out new targets for the region to grow to 2.8 million, or 500,000 people by 2040. This represents a significant shift from current policy and projected trends in favour of a redirection of future population growth to the four cities outside Dublin, which are proposed to grow by more than twice as much to 2040 as they did over the past 25 years.

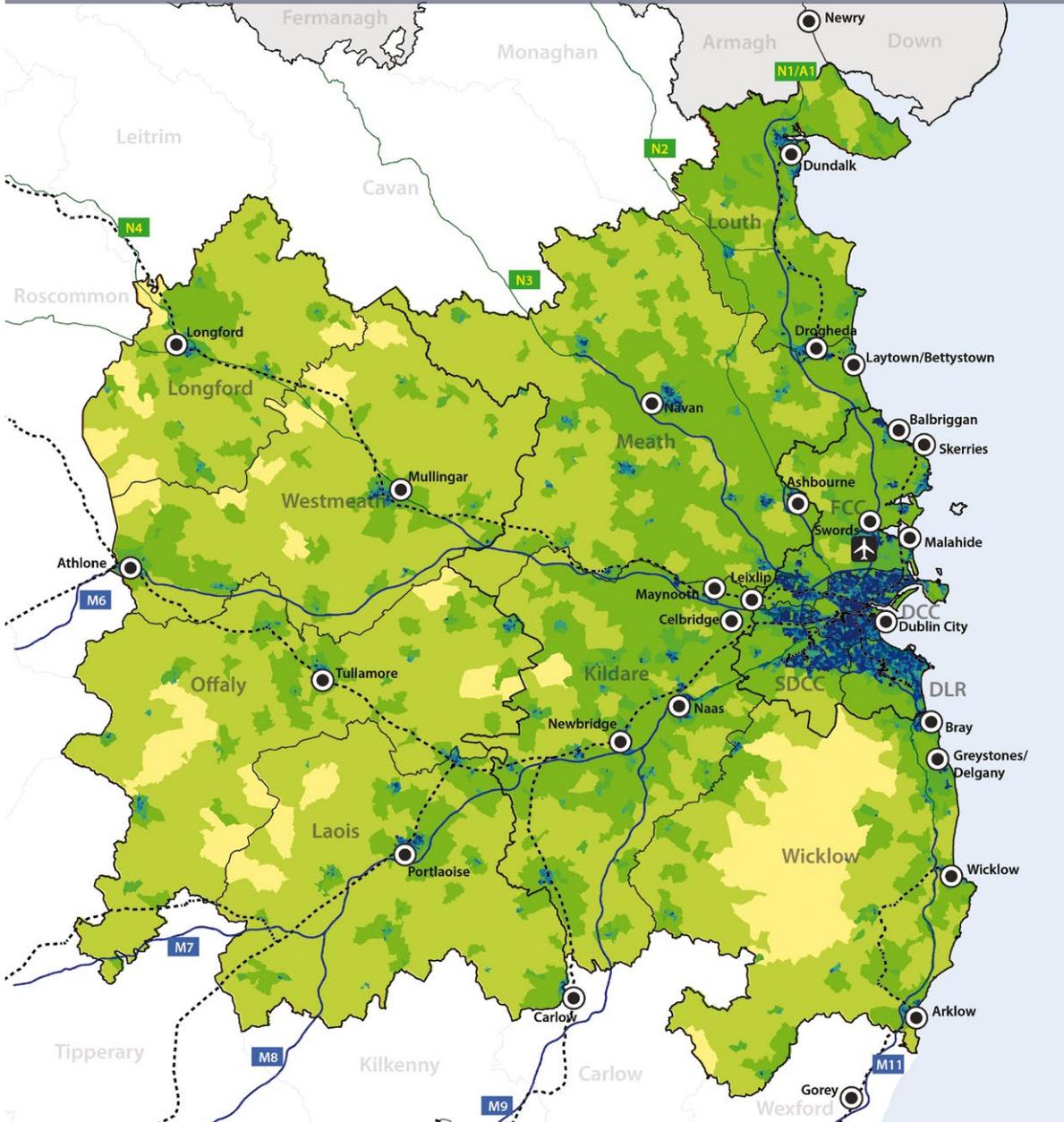
Based on the Census 2016, the population of a number of counties in the region were close to the RPG 2016 population targets, with Fingal exceeding their target for population growth. Population growth in the region was driven by natural increase, adding 303,000 people in the ten years to 2016. Natural increase driven growth is set to continue having regard to the region's demographic, which is the youngest in the state and adding to this is a more recent return to net inward migration. The RSES will need to consider the implications of NPF targets, in terms of planning for the sustainable growth needs of the region.

Key questions:

- What do demographic trends tell us about what our region might look like in 2030?
- How can we address the reality of trends but also allow for new opportunities to shape the future into something better?
- How do we ensure that the needs of future population growth are planned and provided for?
- How can we make best use of available evidence to plan for the future needs of our young and growing population?

EMRA: Population Density per Sqkm, 2016

By Small Area (SA)



Map Legend

Population Density per SqKM, 2016 (SA)

	<10
	10 to <30
	30 to <100
	100 to <500
	500 to <1,000
	1,000 to <3,000
	3,000 to <5,000
	> 5,000

- Strategic Planning Area (SPA)
- Local Authority
- Motorway
- Other Key Roads
- Light & Heavy Rail Network
- Key Settlements



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 Data Source: CSO Census 2016



EMRA Population Change , 2006 to 2016

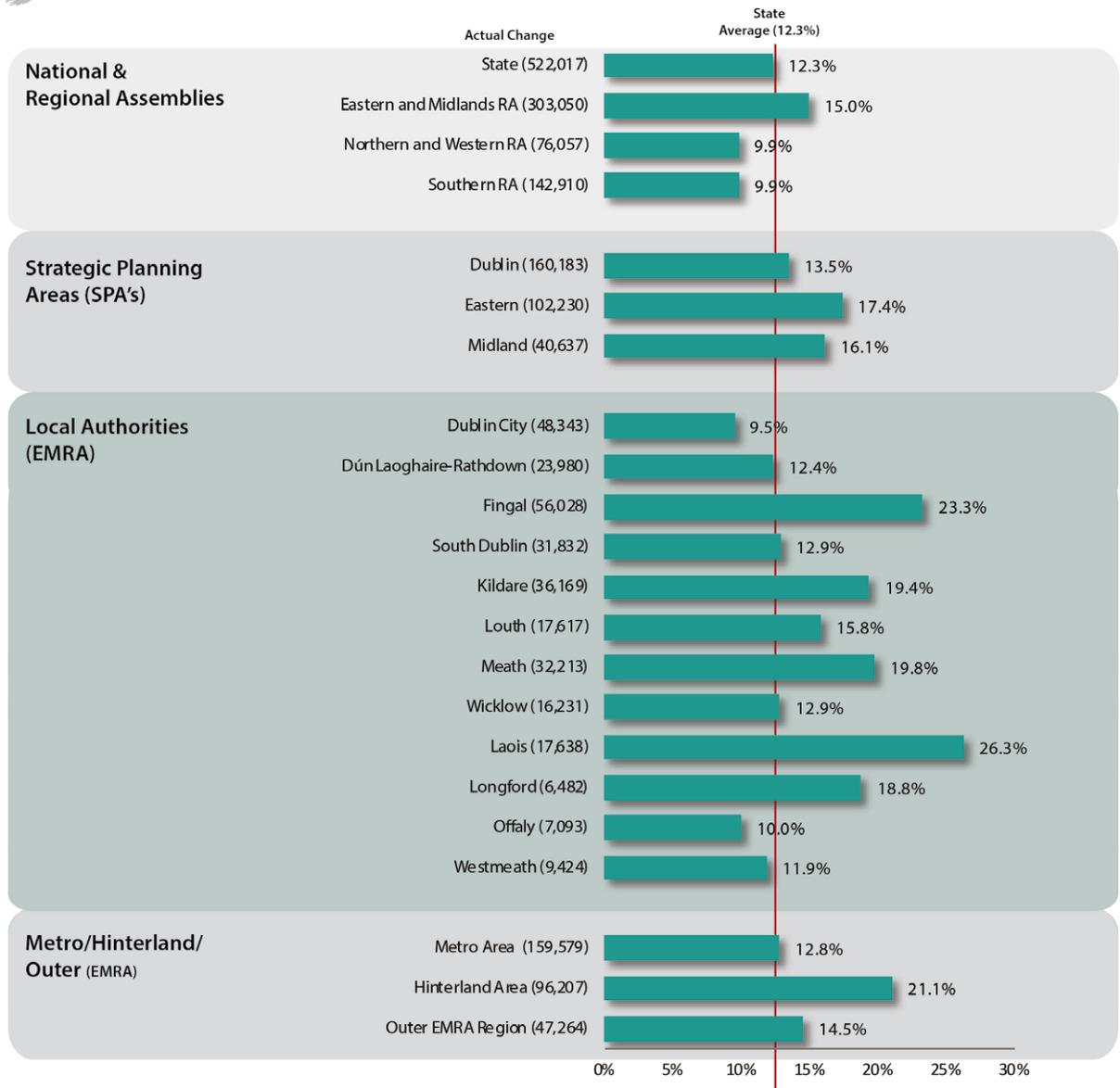


Figure 3.7 Population Change, CSO 2006 to 2016



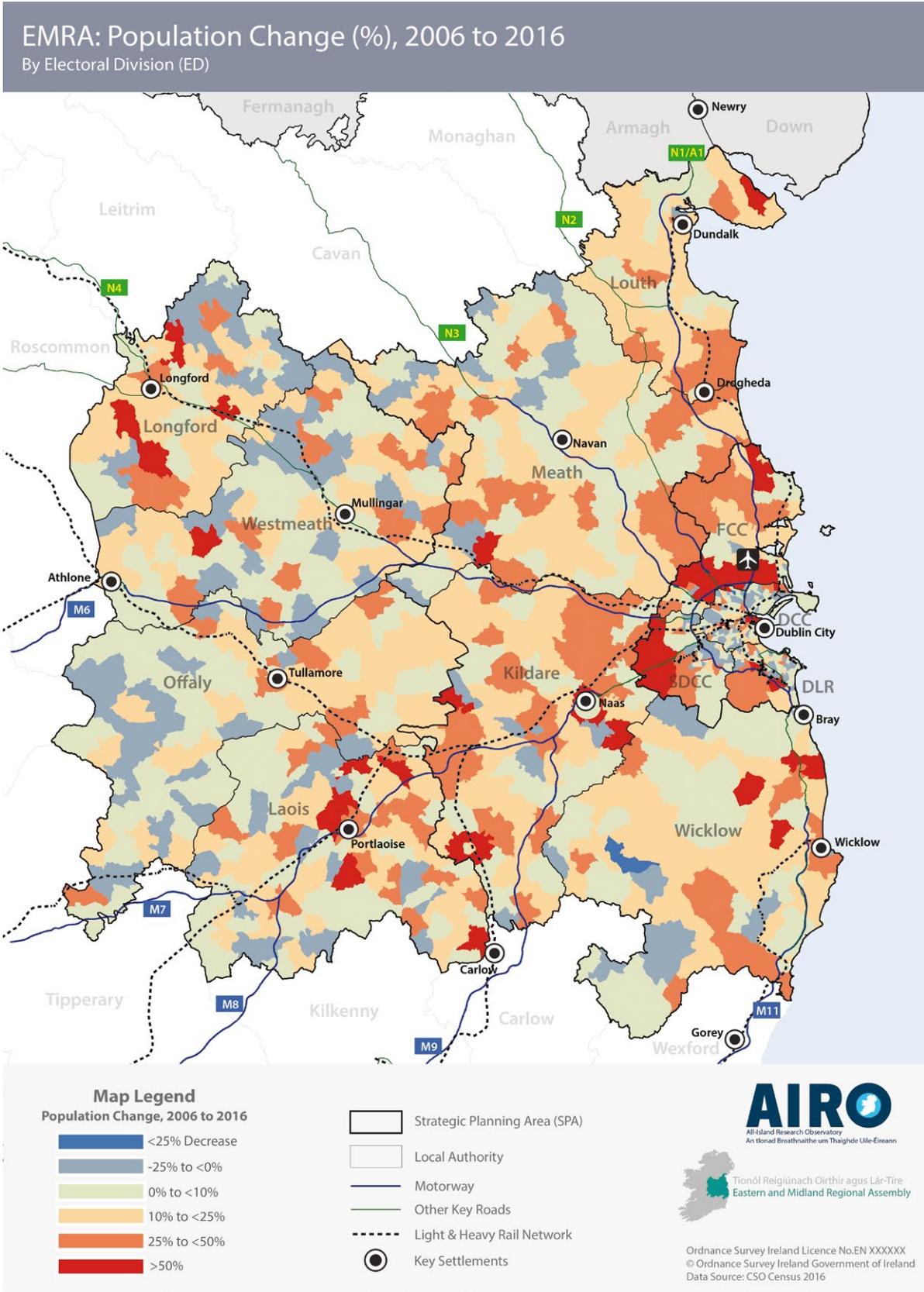


Figure 3.8 Population Change by Electoral District, CSO 2006 to 2016

Housing

The RSES is tasked with the development of planning policy for future housing needs in the region upon consideration of the availability of land, resources, environment and infrastructure capacity.

This will set the framework for housing needs assessment within the Development Plans of each local authority and subsequently the quantum of residentially zoned land required. It is critical therefore that housing targets are robust, evidence based, and driven by clear sustainability and quality of life objectives.

The draft NPF has set out overall projected housing requirements to 2040 for cities and towns along with certain parameters for rural housing within areas of urban influence. The RSES will need to consider how national population and housing growth parameters as set out in the draft NPF will impact on the quantification of future housing demand and supply in the region – looking at population growth, age profiles, occupancy rates and migration patterns.

While the RSES takes a long-term view regarding demand and need, there is a need to understand current drivers in the housing market and the impact this could have on supply. One of the key challenges facing the region is that the rates of population growth and household formation continue to grow while there has been a considerable slowdown in the supply of increased housing stock since 2011. This has led to an increase in the average number of persons per household to 2.75 – a reversal of long-term decline in the average household size. The Draft NPF identifies an average household size/occupancy rate of 2.5 across the region.

Homeownership is still the dominant tenure but rates of private rental are growing, with 1 in 5 households in the region in the private rental market with highest rates in urban centres of Dublin, Longford and Tullamore. High rates of state assistance payments to the private rental sector, with 58% of state spend on rental supplement in the region in 2015, suggesting issues in relation to housing security and inadequate provision of social and affordable housing. The scale of house building fell dramatically in the region during the economic recession and is not yet recovered due to the long lead in time for development.

The overall lack of housing supply to meet a growing population has resulted in increasing house prices and rents and the critical issue of increasing homelessness, with 1 in 3 homeless persons a child. These serious issues are most pronounced in Dublin and urban counties but affect all of the region, which will need to be reflected in the policies of the new regional strategies. While much has been done to address housing vacancy in urban counties, there remain legacy issues with higher levels in more peripheral and rural areas in particular County Longford.

The long-term trend is for residential development moving further outwards from Dublin, with significant growth in many of the small towns and villages in the peri-urban area surrounding the city. Continued demand for single dwellings in rural parts of Kildare, Meath, Fingal and beyond, presents a need to better understand the reasons why people choose to live where they do.

There is also a choice to live in urban areas, and given the policy considerations in the draft NPF to converge where people live and where people work, more compact urban living is a consideration for all our regions urban settlements. Historically we have mixed results in providing compact urban residential development with issues over density, height, unit sizes, private and public open space, car parking and community services all proving challenging to delivering high quality urban residential environments.

Many of the children of parents who moved to these new homes will become young adults over the lifetime of the RSES. There is a need to develop a robust evidence baseline, reliable population projections, forecasts and scenarios in order to deliver the necessary housing along with supporting services and infrastructure to meet the long term needs of our young and growing population.

Key questions:

- Where will people live and what types of housing will they need in 2030?
- How do plan for an adequate supply of the right types of accommodation in the right locations?
- How do we meet the housing needs of a changing demographic into the future, including increased numbers of students and older people?
- How do we provide high quality and higher density housing in urban locations?
- How to ensure flexible housing types that adapt to family life cycles?
- How do address cost of building and housing affordability issues which are in part contributing to the current housing and homelessness crisis?



Health and wellbeing

The place or environment in which we live or work, including its physical nature and social environment of community, has a profound impact on the health of people.

Planning, through development management and policy formulation that drives the location of infrastructure, people, health and community services, plays a central role in creating places that enhance people’s health and wellbeing. Issues such as obesity, heart problems, stress and mental health are inextricably intertwined to the places and environments within which people live and work. See Figure 3.9, which shows where people reported their self-perceived health as bad or very bad, on census night.

Place making is an essential link between spatial planning and facilitating improvements to people’s quality of life and must be at the core of the RSES as it seeks to enhance the region for its people. Irish culture has a longstanding identification with place, however there has been some decline in sense of place in parts of the region with the emergence of issues such as suburban sprawl, rural decline and hollowing of older inner city and town areas. The RSES should therefore take the opportunity to explore and enhance the potential of urban and rural places, in achieving quality homes, enhancing public realm and providing necessary supporting infrastructure.

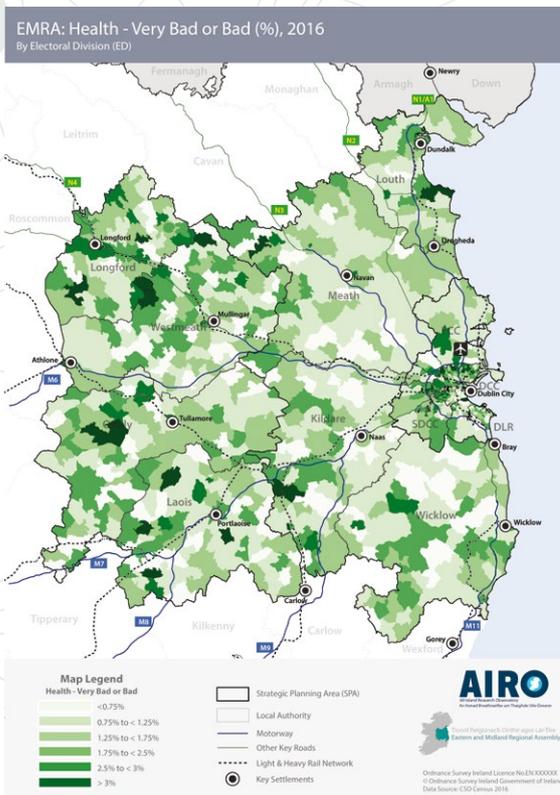


Figure 3.9 Self-Reported Health – Bad or Very Bad, CSO 2016

Key questions:

- What are the key priorities for the region to improve the health and wellbeing of our people?
- How can we plan for healthier and more attractive places, by 2030?
- How can we encourage healthier behaviours to enable greater participation in healthier lifestyles?
- What changes are needed to improve the public realm, for people?
- How can we integrate natural and green spaces into our urban areas?
- How can we ensure that each place meets its potential in terms of social and economic opportunities?

There are number of issues to consider when seeking to promote and create healthier places;

Demographic Change: It is recognised that the growth of different places across the region is not uniform, with some areas facing on-going population decline and under investment, while other places are facing rapid urbanisation or suburbanisation where rates of growth have accelerated beyond the capacity of the place's infrastructure, housing and job opportunities. Changing age structures and an ageing population also present challenges for the region. These issues require a planning response that will deliver adequate housing, ensure balance between competing land uses, limit environmental pressures and address social needs such as provision of jobs and public services.

Settlement Form: Places that are typified by poor connectivity and lower residential and employment densities are characterised by lower rates of walking and cycling and a significantly higher rate of private car travel than their denser counterparts. For the region many factors (as detailed earlier in this paper) have pushed large scale urban growth to the suburbs and peri-urban areas of Dublin, resulting in increased length of trips facilitated by the dominance of the private motor car. In the commuter belt ring around Dublin around one third of people are early morning commuters, departing for work or education before 7 am in the morning, see Figure 3.10 At Work-Departure Time. There is significant evidence linking the experience of sprawl and long-distance commuting with poor health outcomes and impacts on employee productivity and absenteeism.

Access to Services: This includes access to services such as healthcare, housing, waste and water infrastructure, the provision of which is often considered at a national level detached from the environments in which they operate. There is need to consider how public services are organised and offered spatially. Housing is not just about providing quantity; the quality is also important in order to secure positive health outcomes. Likewise, housing shortages are impacting upon health and wellbeing, due to overcrowding, people residing in substandard accommodation and homelessness.

Transport: Transport infrastructure influences people determining places in which they both live and work. Transport can affect health and wellbeing both directly, for example through traffic accidents, commuter stress, or accessibility to employment and health services and indirectly, for example through higher rates of diseases and ill health as a result of pollution or sedentary lifestyles. Increasing traffic is a health hazard that predominantly effects the more socially disadvantaged and deprived. In contrast the provision of good public transport, greenways and cycleways can enhance areas, contributing to liveable places and creating opportunities to be physically active. There is need to overcome barriers to better mobility be they political, economic or physical such as poverty, disability, affordability or gender.

Open Space: The incorporation of open space and green infrastructure into settlements is proven to contribute to improved physical and mental health. Whilst access to green spaces improves levels of physical and mental wellbeing, it is important to consider these within a holistic framework as this can be enhanced through other means in the built environment including the quality of the surrounding environment, density of residencies, land-use mix, connectedness and walkability. The presence of green spaces also has a role to play in reducing air pollution, mitigating floods, protecting wildlife and improving building energy performance.

Social and economic opportunity: Irish people are generally positive about their perceived health, however there is a clear link between health and social class with self-reported rates of good health much lower in areas of social disadvantage. The Trutz Haase deprivation index identifies pockets of affluence and deprivation in the region. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown is the only county that would be classified overall as advantaged, with parts of Longford that are classified as extremely disadvantaged. Employment in particular is identified as a central determinant of health and wellbeing, with unemployment and underemployment having adverse mental and physical health consequences. Education and skills are closely related to employment opportunities, with rates of third level education highest in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and the lowest retention rates (where secondary school students do not complete their junior or leaving cert qualification) in Dublin City, Louth, South Dublin and Offaly.

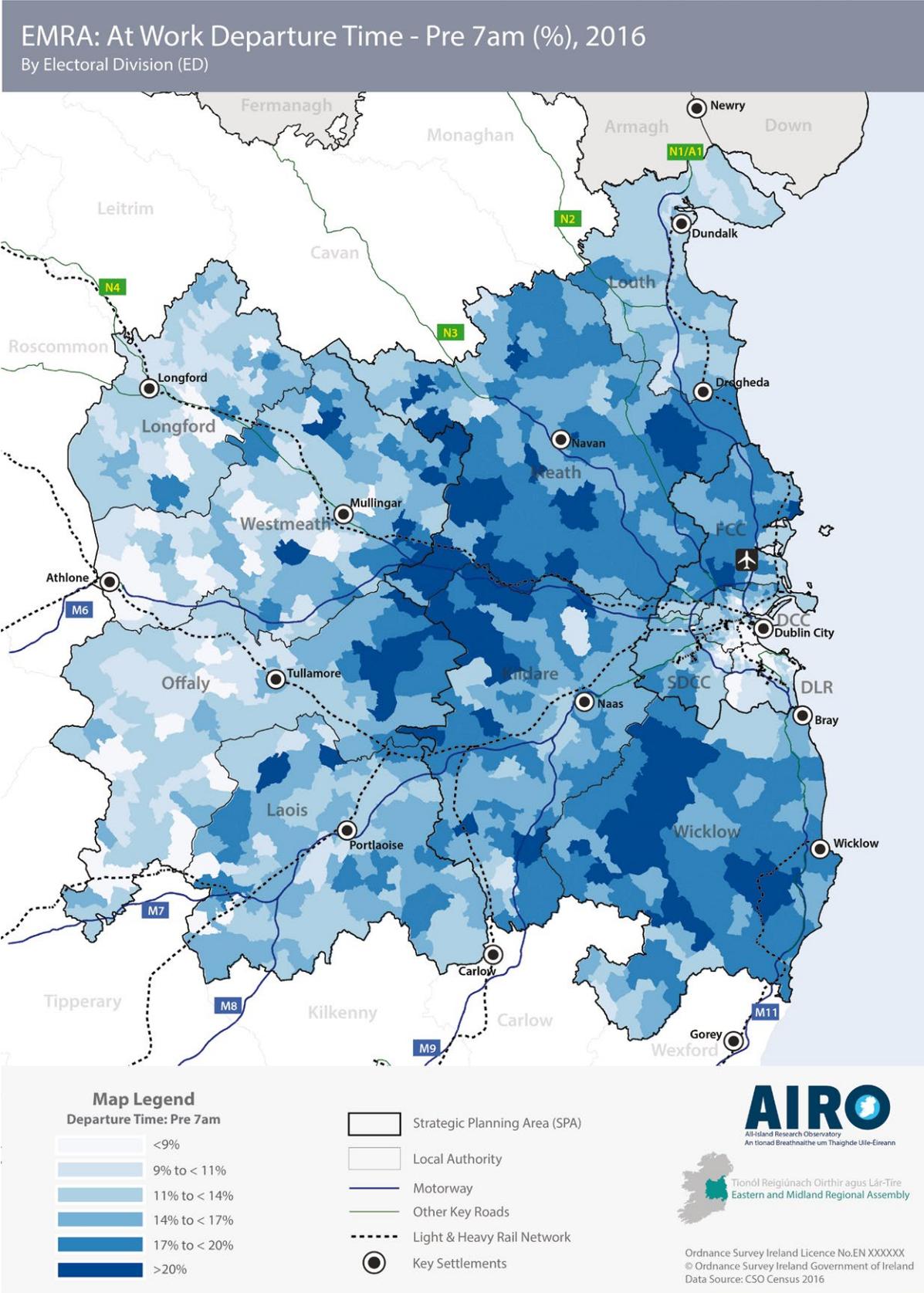


Figure 3.10 At Work - Departure Time - Pre 7a.m. CSO 2016

EMRA: Pobal HP Deprivation Index - Relative Score, 2016

By Small Area (SA)



Map Legend

Commuter Flows to Dublin Metro Area

- Extremely Disadvantaged
- Very Disadvantaged
- Disadvantaged
- Marginally below Average
- Marginally above Average
- Affluent
- Very Affluent
- Extremely Affluent

- Strategic Planning Area (SPA)
- Local Authority
- Motorway
- Other Key Roads
- Light & Heavy Rail Network
- Key Settlements



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 Data Source: CSO Census 2016

Figure 3.11 Deprivation Index- Relative score, Pobal HP 2016

4. Economy & Employment

Determining a spatial economic strategy

Economic development is a key element of regional planning. The economic activity and growth levels within the region drive population growth, needs for infrastructure and transport connections, construction and the take-up of development lands.

The RSES must therefore consider current economic forecasts to inform assessment of future need and to allow for economic growth in the most sustainable and suitable locations supporting national economic development. Given that productivity growth is a key driver of a country's prosperity, we need to put in place actions in the region that will enable such growth in a sustainable basis.

The current RPGs were prepared as Ireland was entering a period of severe economic downturn after years of unprecedented growth from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. The downturn meant a steep rise in unemployment and government debt levels, a return to emigration, and a major decline in public investment in infrastructure and services. The current housing crisis is a reflection of that underinvestment. More recently the national economy has recovered, with a return to strong expansion. However there remain challenges such as the uneven recovery across the regions and SPAs. More generally, there are increasing pressures on the labour market - reflected in skills shortages - and infrastructure - with congestions - along with uncertainty around external issues such as Brexit and global outlooks. Given these issues, there is a national and international consensus that the Irish economy will grow at a slower pace in the coming years.

Ireland is a highly open market economy that relies on enterprise development - that is the formation of new business, known as start-ups and the growth of existing business known as scale-ups. A diverse local sectoral mix that is a large number of firms producing goods and services across a wide number of sectors is a strong determinant for entrepreneurship, and therefore economic growth. Enterprise capacity is determined by a number of factors including the availability of skilled labour force and connectivity with broadband infrastructure and access to quality transport infrastructure.

The Irish economy has been highly dependent on the attraction of foreign-assisted businesses into the country, often as a response to unemployment crises.

There are a number of key factors to build local sustainable competitive advantages for the attraction and expansion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):

- Urbanisation - availability of well-serviced sites and 'place-making' to develop attractive places to invest, live and work.
- Connectivity - building connections regionally, nationally and internationally through business, people and the research system.
- Talent- developing skills and attracting talent that is aligned with the needs of enterprise.
- Innovation - supporting enterprises to be innovative and building an innovation eco-system.
- Co-ordination - a structured approach towards inward investment to develop 'insidership', that is the capacity to identify, access and benefit from co-location advantages leading to 'demonstration effects' and further attractiveness.



National economic policy will inform RSES plan making. This national economic policy is embodied in government economic policy documents such as the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) policy for Enterprise 2015-2025, the relevant Regional Action Plans for Jobs (RAPJ) Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and the ten-year National Capital Investment Plan. The Assembly will need to work with relevant agencies to plan ahead in identifying future employment sectors for the right places, ensuring the needs of employers are met and that future jobs that are created will enable a rise in living standards.

The Eastern and Midland region is the most productive and competitive of the three Irish regions, with the capital city region of Dublin as a national economic driver. The draft NPF sets out a policy framework that seeks close the gap of regional performance between our region and the other two Irish regions. Population growth aligned with job growth for Dublin to 2040, at 23% is significantly less than the other four city regions, which are targeted to grow by three times the national average up to 60%. The RSES will need to consider the implications of NPF targets as they will set the parameters for the distribution of economic growth and set the framework for County Development Plans and LECPs, along with subsequent requirements for economic and employment zoned lands.

DBEI (2015) issued a framework for the development of Regional Enterprise Strategies, from which the current Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJs) have been formulated, which are similar in geographic scale to the region's SPAs. According to this framework, the RAPJs are developed from the 'bottom-up', with the key regional stakeholders, such as local authorities, regional bodies, higher education institutions, other public bodies, the private sector and communities, working collaboratively across the region. The framework recognises that economic activity is not confined to administrative boundaries, and that it is important that the RAPJs and the Regional Enterprise Strategies address synergies and cross-regional frameworks for collaboration between the regions. These documents are key influencers on the LECPs which have been adopted by each of the local authorities in our region, the LECPs will play a key role in informing the economic strategy of the RSES.

Key questions:

- How can policy making in the RSES consider functional areas instead of administrative boundaries?
- How can economic, environment and social dimensions be approached in the RSES to ensure the delivery of sustainable regional development?
- What are the opportunities for alignment with policies such as EU Cohesion policy and sectoral policies at regional level such as health, education, transport, and public safety?
- Should we consider emerging economic policy approaches such as cluster policy, regional innovation systems, and smart specialisation strategies?
- How can we harness the potential policy instruments such as innovation vouchers, special economic zones, and integrated territorial investments (ITI)?
- How can we enable the development of a sustainable regional economy with strong resilience to external shocks such as Brexit?
- Transition to a circular economy involves changes in the principles of our economic model can we make those changes?

Regional economic profile

The Eastern and Midland Region is the economic engine of the State; the region produces well over half of national output and generates €47,500 of gross value added per person, which is well above the state average.

The region is responsible for hosting half of all national employment. The region is also the main global gateway to the country with Dublin Airport one of the fastest growing in Europe, and continued growth in international exports through Dublin Port. A robust enterprise base of traditional and emerging sectors and a highly skilled labour force has helped the region attract FDI and multinational enterprises (MNEs). The region has strong clusters of universities and research centres to support innovation. Figure 4.1 shows a selection of key regional indicators that show the comparative performance of the region and state.

While the GDA is a hub for FDI, across the region it is local enterprise and SMEs that provides the most employment with the East and Midland counties having the highest share of micro enterprises. This extends from the horticultural heartland of north Dublin to agri-business in the East and Midlands, with regional specialisations such as agri-business, horticulture, food, equine and creative industries to vital employment sectors such as retail, tourism and education. There is a need to improve links between foreign-assisted and indigenous business in order to build a critical mass of international competitive indigenous business and to reduce reliance on FDI.

One of the critical determinants of a region's enterprise development capacity is human capital. There are over one and a half million people of working age (15 – 64 years) in EMRA, around half of the state's total labour force. The spatial distribution of the labour force and the level of education and skills will inform the demands for housing, transport and employment and the capacity of the region to attract high quality employers. The region is also home to half a million children aged under 14 years of age, many of whom will become young adults by 2031 resulting in a significant increase in the number of people in the 15-24 years age bracket, which will lead to pressure for third level education places to ensure the right skills for the labour market and jobs that sustain good living standards.

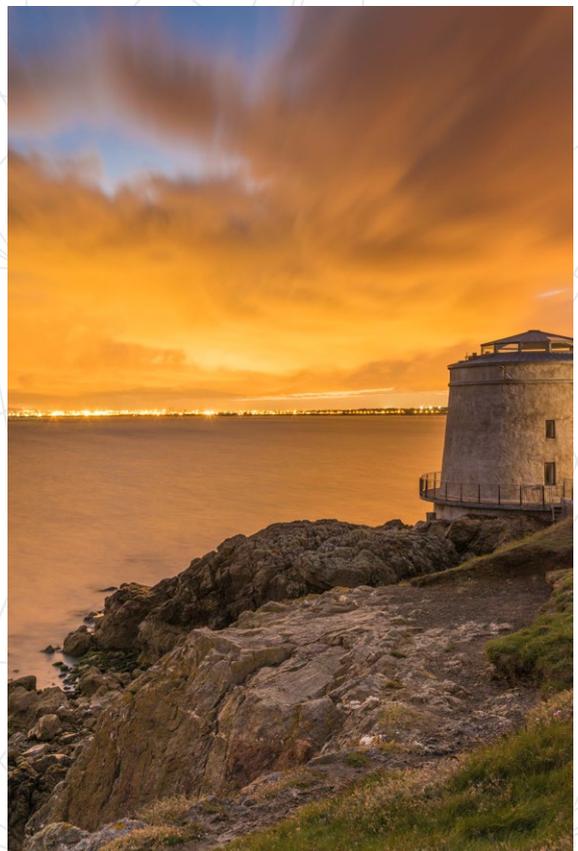


Figure 4.1: Comparative regional performance: Selected Key Regional Indicators

Key Regional Indicator	Latest period reported	EMRA
GVA per capita	2014	€47,449 (State: €38,097)
Disposable income per person	2014	€19,315 (State: €19,178)
Unemployment rate (ILO)	2016 Q4	6.4% (State: 6.4%)
Employment (Where employees live), thousand	2017 Q1	1065 (48% of State)
Jobs (Where employees work), thousand	2017 Q1	1032.6 (51% of State)
Life expectancy at birth (Years)	2006	Male: 77.0 (State: 76.8); Female: 81.4 (State:81.2)
Consistent Poverty Rate (%)	2015	7.3% (State: 8.8%)
Dependency Ratio	2011	39.3 (State: 38.4)
Labour Productivity, GVA (Euro Million)/persons at work (Thousand).	2014	€106,435/person at work (State €92K)
Tertiary education ratio (tertiary/total education ceased and not ceased)	2011	38% (State: 36%)
Most significant industries	2014	Design and Creative Industries, Food Industry, Green economy, International Financial Services, Pharma/Biopharma, Software and Digital, Tourism, Education and Training.
Commuting patterns (proportion of the population that commute less than half an hour)	2011	49% (State 56%)
Broadband (Households with Computer connected to the Internet, %)	2016	88% (State: 87%)
Residential Property Price index, (Houses)	2017 M01	90 (State: 93)
Housing Completions	2016 Q2	1,748 (50% of State)
Population growth rate 2011-2016	2016	5.3% (State: 3.7%)
Population Density, thousand people per square kilometre	2016	161 (State: 68)
Demographic Age Pyramid	2016	Shrinking

Source: CSO (2017), EC (2017), OECD (2017).

It should be noted that the Local Government Reform Act 2014 has included county Louth as part of the Mid-East region (EMRA), however CSO NUTS III data will not be updated accordingly until 2018, so the figures for the Eastern region do not include county Louth, which continues to be accounted to the Border SPA of the Northern and Western Region.

It is also important to consider where jobs are located and where employees reside. Where there is a mismatch between the locations of jobs and where people live, it leads to serious implications in terms of an increase in long distance commuting. This in turn affects quality of life and inefficiencies in infrastructure and local economy due to congestions. Within the region only the Dublin SPA approaches convergence of employment versus jobs, with just over 600,000 resident workers and 578,000 local jobs, while the number of resident workers exceeds local jobs by 113,000 and 34,500 respectively in the Eastern and Midland counties.

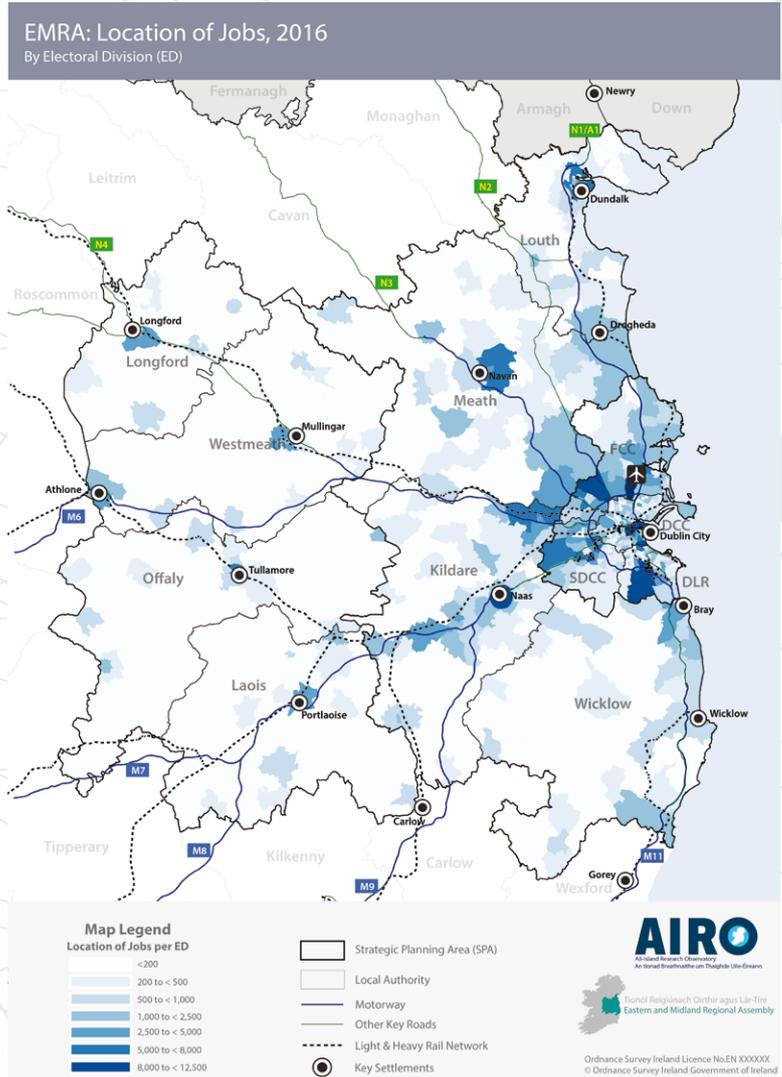


Figure 4.2 Location of Jobs, CSO 2016

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 show the location of jobs compared to the number of resident workers across the region, by county and regional towns.

The RSES is tasked with the development of a spatial economic strategy that should include consideration of current employment locations, locations for expansion of existing enterprises and suitable locations for new enterprises.



Resident Workers and Local Jobs, 2016

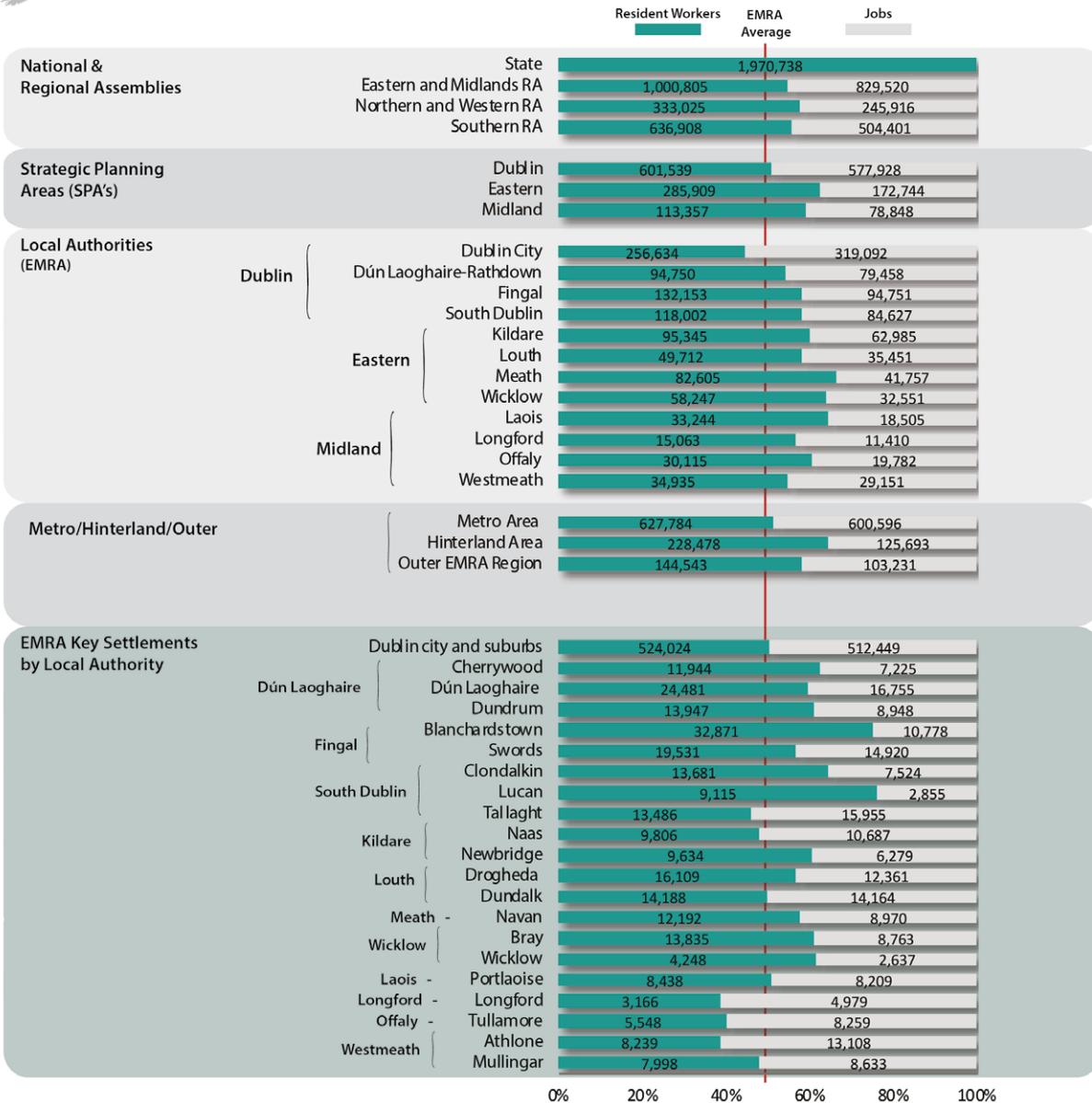


Figure 4.3 Resident Works and Local Jobs, CSO 2016

Key Opportunities:

Key economic sectors that offer opportunities to drive the rest of the economy and these sectors for our region can be inferred from national government policy.

These key economic sectors include:

Pharmaceuticals, ICT, Finance (mainly foreign firms) and Foods processing and Tourism (mainly indigenous firms), Global Business Services, Manufacturing engineered products, Medical technologies, Specialised nutrition & functional foods, Energy green and Cleantech, Digital content (Games, animation and film), International education services, Marine and maritime, Construction, Retail, and Transport and logistics.

Effective Regional Development

From this summary profile, it can be appreciated that the region is a highly competitive and productive, however there are stark differences in economic performance across the region. Figure 4.4 presents a summary profile with selected indicators to depict each of three SPAs, namely Dublin, Eastern and Midland. On one hand, Dublin SPA is the most competitive city-region in the state, on the other hand, the Midland SPA lags well below national averages

Figure 4.4 Strategic Planning Areas - Summary Profiles from the Regional Action Plans for Jobs

Dublin	Eastern (mid-East)	Midlands
2016-2018	2016-2017	2015-2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are over 1.3 million people living in Dublin representing 28% of the total population Projected to grow to 1.39 million by 2021, and to almost 1.55 by 2031 There are 605,600 people at work and unemployment stands at 8% (lower than the state average of 9.3%) Disposable incomes of €50,857 are 28% higher than national average GVA per person at €51,839 relative to the state average of €34,308 36% have a third level qualification, relative to the state average of 29 % Youth dependency at 31% is slightly less than the national average of 34% 	Population (2011, excluding Louth): 531,087 Key labour market data, Q1 2015 with 234,600 in employment. Unemployed: 19,700 In Labour Force: 254,300 Unemployment Rate: 7.8% Tertiary education: 30% of population educated to Third Level or above, (national average 29.1%). GVA 2012 represents 7.7% of State Composition of GVA: Services: 70.9% Manufacturing and Construction: 26.5% Agriculture: 2.7% GVA per Capita 2012: €22,863 (State: €34,308)	Population (2011): 282,410 Key labour market data, Q1 2015 Nos. in employment: 114,000 Unemployed: 16,200 In Labour Force: 130,100 Unemployment Rate: 12.4% Tertiary education: 22.9% of population educated to Third Level or higher (national average 29.1%). GVA 2012 represents 3.3% of State Total Composition of GVA: Services - 77.3% Industry - 19.9%, Agriculture - 2.8%, GVA per Capita 2012: €18,638 (State €34,308)

Source: Dublin Regional Action Plan for Jobs (2016-2018), Mid-Eastern Regional Action Plan for Jobs (2016-2017) and Midlands Regional Action Plan for Jobs (2015-2017).

Another way to appreciate the regional performance differences is by means of observing regional productivity, which as mentioned earlier it is a key driver of economic growth.

Dublin, due to a broader economic base, also displays greater economic resilience, which can explain the two tier economic recovery. However, this increase in economic activity has not been met with an adequate expansion in the provision of critical services such as accommodation and transport.

The Midland SPA would suggest lower levels of economic resilience with a high exposure to negative impacts, such as financial crises or contagion effects from slowdowns in international markets related to the local business base.

Coupled with a greater relative reliance on employment in agri-business this would leave the Midland counties particularly vulnerable to negative impacts from Brexit. From the social aspect, it is important to analyse consistent poverty rates as a measure of economic inequality, where the Midland counties also display higher levels of consistent poverty and unemployment as compared to Dublin and Eastern counties. Figure 4.5 shows where people in the labour force described themselves as unemployed on census night in April 2016.

From the above it is important to highlight the fact that stark intra-regional disparities existing within the region, and to ensure that narrative is not lost, when focus is brought to achieving inter-regional parity at a national policy level.

Key questions:

- How best can we address regional disparities to produce a more sustainable, balanced and competitive region?
- How can we better support the orderly growth of Dublin, as the most competitive SPA in the country?
- What is the best way to support higher growth in regional productivity in the Eastern SPA?
- Can the RSES encourage investment (physical and social) to boost regional productivity to close the gap in the Midlands?

EMRA: Labour Force - Unemployed (%), 2016

By Electoral Division (ED)

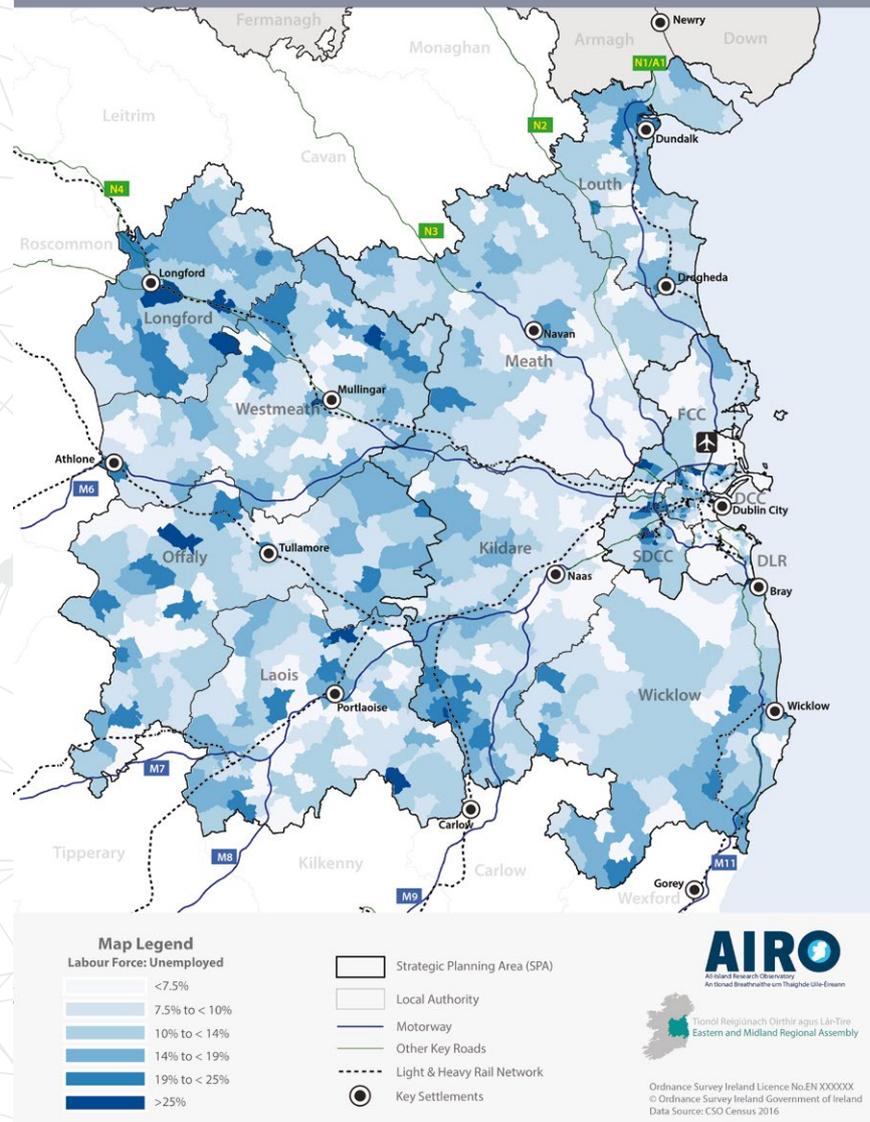


Figure 4.5 Labour force - Unemployed CSO 2016 (Census, April 2016)

Dublin

The Dublin regions economic prowess can be appreciated by its capacity to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and MNEs with the Dublin counties and Kildare having the highest concentration of FDI, see Figure 4.6 for more information on FDI/IDA supported firms across the region.

The region also generates a large amount of business formation, start-ups, and a high concentration of organisations dedicated to research and development, which suggests a critical mass of businesses, a healthy eco-system of innovation where entrepreneurship is prone to emerge and thrive.

According to the Regional Action Plan for Jobs (2015), the regional strengths of Dublin are:

- Dynamic city region that attracts more new business investments than the rest of the country.
- A magnet for mobile entrepreneurs.
- A vibrant location for start-ups.
- A centre for talent - with internationally renowned Higher Education Institutes.
- International access. Mainly EU and US, and also with exposure to Asia, Commonwealth countries, and opening markets to Latin-America and Africa
- Connected nationally - as a key part of a national business ecosystem.
- A cohesive community - vibrant labour market and customer base, and an attractive environment in which to invest, work, learn and live.
- As the national administrative hub.

Dublin Regional Enterprise strategy (2017-2019) identifies key sectors and employment levels, together with the clustering of activity and supports across the region, including; Administration; Professional Services; Tourism and Leisure; Education and Training; Manufacturing and Industry; Transport and Logistics; Construction; ICT and Technology, and Retail and Wholesale.

In addition, the strategy identifies 'growth opportunity areas' that have significant potential for consolidation and expansion in the future: Design and Creative Industries; Food Industry; Green Economy (CleanTech and Environment); International Financial Services; Pharma/ BioPharma; Software and Digital; Tourism, and Education and Training.

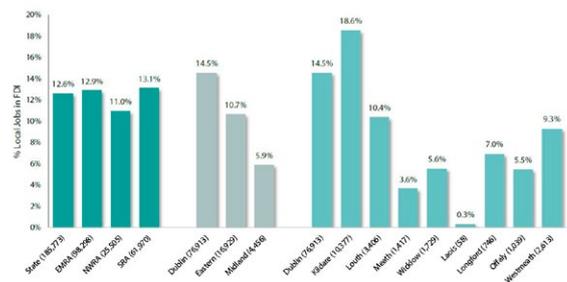


Figure 4.6 Local Jobs in FDI/IDA Supported Firms

Key questions:

- How can Dublin be managed to sustain growth over the longer term and to minimise the occurrence of blockages that may constrain growth?
- What are the policy requirements to address deficits in areas such as housing, transport, commercial space and infrastructure?
- Can we support and further develop links between FDI and indigenous firms and business cluster policies?

Eastern

The Eastern counties have the benefit of proximity to Dublin and enjoy good national and international connectivity with a number of motorway corridors and major roads, which provide links to Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford, as well as Dublin. The following are some strengths and opportunities for development.

Strengths:

- Connectivity and access. The Eastern SPA has a strong competitive advantage in its accessibility and the quality of its infrastructure.
- Higher education and research, Maynooth University hosts renowned research centres having a strong track record of facilitating commercialisation and innovation opportunities.
- Skills: The eastern counties labour force ranks second highest in the State (after Dublin) for its proportion of those educated to third level or above (30%).
- Cultural assets. The east has very strong tourism and leisure offering including heritage sites of international importance, infrastructure for outdoor recreation and areas of natural beauty, as well as excellent national and international connectivity.

According to the Mid-East RAPJ (2016-2017), key sectoral strengths include; Tourism, Agri-food, Equine, Culture, Design and Creative Industries (particularly film), Retail, and Renewable Energy.

In addition, 'growth opportunity areas' that have significant potential for consolidation and expansion include: Innovation and Research Commercialisation; Software and ICT cluster; Renewable Energy; Tourism and Outdoor Recreation; New Inward Investment; Education and Skills; Film related tourism and Equine sector.

The eastern counties display a relative lower regional economic resilience, and reports the highest levels of commuting to the Dublin metropolitan area, with potential negative impact on quality of life for its residents. In terms of business development, the Eastern counties are characterised by urban-rural split that requires a dual policy response, with rapidly urbanising areas within good accessibility close to Dublin and low population and employment densities, in more rural peripheral areas

Key questions:

- What policy response is required to deal with the adverse effects of the outwards sprawl of the city region?
- How can we achieve better alignment between population and employment growth?
- Can we encourage better integration of housing and public transport infrastructure?

Midland

The midland SPA is a dynamic region, centrally located in the heart of Ireland, with unparalleled national interconnectivity. Key strengths are identified in its Regional Action Plan for Jobs including:

- National corridor for road and rail infrastructure within 1 hour of Dublin and Galway.
- Good access to a number of international airports and ports to serve European and global markets.
- Significant catchment area with access to a highly qualified workforce and a diverse range of graduates and postgraduates across all disciplines.
- Institute of Technology (Athlone IT) serving R&D needs of both indigenous and multinational industry, with three strategic research institutes and close links to other Universities and ITs.
- Advanced energy networks.
- Track record in serving global markets.
- A number of business and technology parks designed to international standards.
- Strong collaboration between public bodies in the region.
- A rich quality of life, clean environment, and unique heritage that is valued and safeguarded.
- Significant natural amenities and heritage to offer a unique visitor experience.

The Midlands Regional Action Plan for Jobs (2015-2017) identifies the following sectors with growth potential: Tourism, Manufacturing, Food Sector; Internationally Traded Services and Software; Energy and Sustainability.

The Midlands lags behind in employment, productivity, and disposable income per person. Given its business low-density, it displays low levels of regional economic resilience and was heavily hit by the crash because of its disproportionately high dependence on the construction sector during the property boom.

Key questions:

- How to boost smart innovation in a low density area and increase its economic resilience with a mix of sectors?
- Can we encourage investment in physical and social infrastructure to boost place attractiveness?
- What is required to promote natural asset based economic growth such as tourism, leisure and energy?

Key regional questions

1. What parts of the regional economy are most valued?
2. What parts of the economy account for the most substantial number of jobs and growth in wealth?
3. What parts of the regional economy are growing most rapidly, forming jobs and generating opportunity?
4. What can local leaders do about other parts that are declining?
5. How does growth or decline in one part of the regional economy affect other parts?
6. Where are the key clusters of firms and related industries emerging?



5. Environment and heritage

Our safe, clean environment, scenic landscapes and rich heritage contribute greatly to our cultural identity and quality of life, and are the main attraction for overseas visitors to the island of Ireland.

The region is home to areas of immense natural beauty from the beaches of the eastern seaboard, the Wicklow and Slieve Bloom Mountains, the River Shannon, the Royal and Grand canals and the many lakes, fens, bogs, and forests that make up the rich diverse landscapes of our region.

The overall quality of our environment is good and progress has been made in reducing air pollutants and protecting the quality of water bodies from source to sea and our natural and wild places. However, we also face particular challenges in relation to drinking water and urban waste water treatment and some localised air quality issues. As an island nation Ireland is particularly vulnerable to climate change and one of the most pressing issues we face today is how we will de-carbonise our economy and meet our climate commitments.

Ireland is unlikely to meet its 2020 climate change targets, more action on climate change is needed urgently. This will require coordinated action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and increase resilience to predicted adverse impacts of temperature and sea level rise, more extreme weather patterns and the increased likelihood of river and coastal flooding. It will also be necessary to make choices to ensure maximum resource efficiency in the way we plan for the sustainable development of our region across land use, transportation, energy, water and waste sectors.

There are opportunities too; Ireland has abundant natural resources as well as the energy and talent to become a leader in this transition to a low carbon and resource efficient economy. A clean well protected environment supports our health and wellbeing, food supply and tourism. The development of a circular economy and our renewable energy potential will help to future proof our region, to take greater care of our non-renewable resources and explore new ways to add value by turning waste into new resources such as food or bio-energy.

The region is well placed to play a key role in promoting and facilitating multi stakeholder collaboration in environmental planning through our participation and leadership in a number of EU projects in the areas of green infrastructure (En Route), resilience of critical infrastructure (RESILENS), marine strategy framework directive (Celtic Seas) and in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency (UrbAdapt, GBI health), see figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 EMRA Projects - Environmental and Climate Resilience



The RSES will support relevant environmental plans and policy, including the NPF, through the development of strategic environment and sustainability policy goals, for example:

- To adopt the principles of the circular economy.
- To accelerate action on climate change.
- To transition to a low carbon energy future.
- To encourage sustainable land use and management strategies in the region.
- To sustainably develop the potential of our marine resources.
- To ensure clean air and water quality.
- To address flood risk and coastal erosion.
- To protect and promote our built and cultural heritage.
- To integrate green infrastructure into regional planning.

Key questions:

- What are the appropriate regional planning policy responses to help us achieve our environment and sustainability goals?
- Where are the policy areas where the regional strategies can best accelerate a response to climate change to meet our emission reduction targets for 2020 / 2030 / 2050?
- Where are specific spatial planning policies needed to guide the location of regional development for maximum resource efficiency?
- How can we support the development of clean technologies and different types of renewables including small scale solar and micro generation?
- What is the potential for the development of Strategic Energy zones and district energy networks?
- How can we develop a circular economy in the region and support the implementation of regional waste management plans?
- How can we ensure full integration of the SEA and AA process into the plan making of the RSES?

Land use

Ireland's location as a small island on the western periphery of Europe, has shaped our landscape, settlement patterns and our sense of national identity. Our land is our key asset.

Ireland's temperate climate and diverse geology combine to sustain productive soils and high quality agricultural produce, from dairy and livestock in the flat-lying Midlands, horticulture and cereals in the eastern lowlands and sheep in the Wicklow uplands. Dublin alone contributes one fifth of the total economic value of the agri food sector nationally. However, ambitious targets for growth in agricultural output as part of Food Wise 2025 in particular for the beef sector, need to be achieved in a way that combines economic sustainability with environmental sustainability and does not compromise our climate obligations.

Agricultural production, sustainability, food security and health are closely linked. Farmers can play a key role in the management of grasslands, hedgerows, wetlands and woodlands, which provide important ecosystem services on which we all depend for our well-being; for clean air and water, healthy soils, carbon storage, food and energy production, biodiversity and flood control.

There is a need to recognise and protect the productive value of agricultural land, particularly in areas under urban development pressure from the expansion of Dublin and its hinterlands. The uplands forestry and peatlands in the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains and the peat bogs in the Midlands have an important regional role in terms of land management and as carbon sinks, but also offer combined energy and amenity potential and new tourism and local employment opportunities.

Our forest estates provide biodiversity and water regulation in addition to their commercial value for biomass and wood products, the challenge will be to identify suitable land for sustainable afforestation and for the regeneration of native woodland. There is a need to consider the long-term strategy for Bord na Móna peat bogs to manage a transition from the extraction of peat, towards a natural asset based rural economy in the Midland SPA.

Land is a finite resource. The continued urbanisation of our landscape has led to competing land use pressures on agriculture and the rural landscape that supports it.

A key challenge will be to develop effective land use management strategies that help us balance competing land uses in planning for the growth of our region, which include:

- urban (driven by demand for housing, employment and transport)
- agriculture (driven by demand for food)
- our wild and natural places (help us maintain a clean and healthy environment)

Key questions:

- What are the key development pressures and land use challenges in our region how can we achieve a balance between competing land uses?
- What are the key strategic natural assets we need to protect - including our grasslands, wetlands, waterways, peatlands, woodlands and uplands?
- What can the regional strategies do to improve the monitoring, implementation and enforcement of sustainable land use to promote compact growth patterns?
- What is the potential for future use of state managed peatlands and forestry?
- How can we support a transition to low carbon farming at a regional policy level?
- How can we sustainably develop our mineral and natural resources?

Marine

Ireland has a vast marine resource, with a seabed territory that covers ten times our landmass.

The region has more than 270km of coastline that stretches from Carlingford Lough in Louth to Kilmichael Point on the Wicklow - Wexford border encompassing coastal villages, 10 blue flag beaches and the UNESCO designated Dublin Bay Biosphere.

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) concerns the protection of marine waters through the application of the ecosystem-based approach for the management of human activities. The MSFD has the target of maintaining or achieving Good Environmental Status in marine waters by 2020 and aims to ensure that Ireland's marine waters are managed sustainably for the future.

The Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive offers guidance in terms of managing and integrating different uses in marine areas. MSP has been promoted as a tool for the sustainable management of the marine environment and as a means of building consensus with regard to the use of marine resources. Ireland is required to establish a maritime spatial plan by 2021.

Many of our oldest towns and cities were founded as trading ports with Dublin Port a key international maritime gateway and the regional ports of Drogheda, Dún Laoghaire and Wicklow. However, long term consolidation trends to achieve efficiencies of scale in commercial shipping presents opportunities for deepwater ports with large scale infrastructure, whereas other ports have experienced steep decline in maritime freight. In Dublin Port the Alexandra Basin Redevelopment project is the most significant infrastructural development planned by Dublin Port Company in the past 100 years.

Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth (HOOW) - An Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland is a high level policy document published in 2012. It sets out the Irish Government's vision, high-level goals and integrated actions across policy, governance and business to enable the potential of the marine environment to be realised.

Fishing remains a substantial sub-sector with Howth being one of six national Fishery Harbour Centres and a number of coastal villages, which face challenges in relation to seasonal employment and coastal hazards such as erosion and flooding, but also opportunities for diversification into water based tourism, maritime transport and the development of bio resources such as food, aquaculture and offshore energy.

The region has a large offshore wind resource, with Ireland's first major off shore wind farm at Arklow Bank and other projects in the Irish Sea. While installation costs tend to be higher than on-shore, there is potential offshore technology to help us meet renewables targets, especially where wind speeds are high and the sector will become more important in meeting our national energy demands if we are to achieve a low carbon economy and an energy secure future.

Key questions:

- What are our key strategic coastal and marine assets? How can we build on these to develop marine based tourism in our region?
- How can we realise the potential of our marine resources, while protecting our unique coastal and marine environments?
- How can we best plan to meet the long term need of Dublin Port? What is the potential for future development of regional ports?
- How can we support the fishing industry and encourage added value activities such as processing and food production?
- What is the potential for offshore renewable energy in our region?
- What policies are needed to protect our coast from adverse impacts from Climate Change?

Air and water quality

We depend on clean air and water for life itself. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the quality of Irish groundwater and surface water is among the best in Europe, however there remain issues in relation to the treatment of urban waste water (UWWT) before discharge into rivers and the sea.

WWT improvements are needed in 29 urban areas in the region, including to prevent raw sewage being released at Omeath, Rush, Howth, Avoca, and Arklow. There were a number of high profile closures of east coast beaches over the summer of 2017, partly due to overflow from substandard treatment plants following heavy rains.

Water infrastructure in the region is severely constrained with the future security of water supply dependent on a new pipeline from the Shannon Basin to be delivered under the Irish Water, Water Services Strategic Plan. With regard to biodiversity, species considered to be most under threat are those that are linked to wetlands and are sensitive to water pollution.

Poor air quality is directly related to about 1,500 premature deaths in Ireland each year according to the EPA. Particulate matter from the burning of solid fuels, including wood, coal and peat, poses the greatest threat to human health with the problem most acute in small towns and rural areas. The second biggest cause of pollutants is nitrogen dioxide from cars, particularly heavily trafficked urban areas.

The Water Framework Directive aims to protect our water resources such as water bodies, drinking water, bathing water, in Ireland. We are required to achieve good status for all waters by 2015 and the Draft National River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021, proposes a review and consolidation of River Basin Districts under which Management Plans (RBMP) are being prepared. With the aim of protecting designated areas and improving water quality. Despite recent progress, the long-term trend is a steep decline in the number of river sites classified as the highest quality, with agriculture and municipal waste water discharges the two main sources of river pollution.

Fecal contamination of groundwater continues to be a problem with nitrate leached from agricultural soils the largest polluter, however improvements in farming practices and urban wastewater infrastructure has seen a pronounced downward trend in the east of the country as already highlighted.

Key questions:

- What are the strategic priorities for protecting and improving air, water, noise and soil quality in our region?
- Where do we most need strategic infrastructure investment in order to protect environmental quality and human health?
- From a spatial development perspective, how do we address the challenge of adequate water supply and waste water disposal capacity to ensure the growth potential of our larger urban centres?
- How can we best support national plans and policy goals of achieving out targets for good environmental status for all water bodies, from source to sea?
- What does the review of the River Basin Management Plans mean for our region?

Flooding

The Floods Directive, which aims to protect our built environment from flooding, is fully integrated through all levels of land use planning, for example constraining new development on floodplains or requiring mitigation in areas at risk of flooding.

At regional level the focus is on the identification of any strategic flooding or surface water management issues and the provision of appropriate flood protection measure in appropriate locations, such as in or adjacent to town centres. Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) will directly inform RSES in an iterative process over the plan making period.

The OPW, under the National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme (CFRAM) has developed flood maps for 300 areas across the country that are identified as Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs). As well as damaging property, flooding events can also have an impact on water quality.

Flooding is a regular occurrence in Ireland, usually caused by a combination of events include overflowing river banks, coastal storms or blocked or overloaded drains and ditches. As extreme weather events and floods have become more common, there is increasing recognition of the valuable function of floodplains and wetlands in storing and managing floodwater in a controlled and safe way.

Development of new permeable lands and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) in urban areas also plays a role in reducing surface water run off to drainage systems as well as improving water quality and contributing to local amenity.

Key questions:

- How can we support, at a regional level, the implementation of the Floods Directive and the integration of SFRA into the RSES
- Where are the areas in our region, which are strategically important in terms of managing flood risk or coastal erosion?
- What should be our regional priorities in terms of critical infrastructure investment to address flood risk?
- What is the potential to develop 'soft' measures including SuDs, green space and permeable surfaces, to complement flood defenses?

Heritage and Landscape

The region is home to areas of rich heritage and areas of immense natural beauty that are part of our unique cultural identity.

Ireland's landscapes and seascapes are key to our varied tourism and recreation offering and are recognised in the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland, which supports greater consistency in the approach to landscape classification and assessment to ensure the conservation of special landscape areas, which by their nature often extend across administrative boundaries.

The region has a number of sites of special geodiversity and geological heritage that offers potential for the development of tourism activities, such as the 500-million-year-old Cambrian marine sediments at Bray Head, the granite cliffs of Djouce Mountain in the Wicklow Way, the volcanic rocks at Carlingford and the shore in Portrane.

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) is an invaluable built heritage resource for local authorities and the general public. Our region has a varied architectural and archaeological heritage offering that includes nine Irish Heritage Towns, world renowned historic sites from Dublin Castle to the UNESCO World Heritage site at Bru na Boinne and the medieval monasteries of Clonmacnoise and Glendalough, along with numerous protected structures and Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), which enable places of value to be protected, extending to vernacular and industrial buildings and infrastructure.



Key questions:

- What are the key cultural and built heritage assets in our region that need to be protected or enhanced?
- How can we build a strong cultural identity and brand for our region?
- How can support at a regional level, national policies to protect and enhance the value of our unique heritage, landscape and seascapes?

Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

The eastern seaboard has more than 270km of coastline from Carlingford Lough, the UNESCO Dublin Bay biosphere and the Wicklow Mountains to Kilmichael Point.

We have a wide range of Natura 2000 sites, such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) Ramsar wetlands and protected bogs and peatlands. See Figure 5.2 for a map of environmentally sensitive and Protected Areas.

Important coastal zones include Dublin Bay, Dundalk Bay and Carlingford Lough. There are with a number of strategic rivers that include the Boyne Valley, the Liffey Valley, and the River Shannon, which offer huge potential for the development of water based tourism.

Green infrastructure (GI) is the management of our built and natural landscape features in a way that integrates and enhances multi-functional benefits for man and nature including- biodiversity and habitat provision, drainage and flood control, recreation and travel, environmental regulation, food production and local economic and community development. The region has a very wide range of habitat and landscape types which support a diverse range of species in natural, semi-natural and managed sites within relatively close proximity to urban areas.

Ireland has a commitment to halt Biodiversity loss by 2020, It is important to preserve and connect a wide variety of habitats across the region, in particular in the face of threats such as global climate change and invasive alien species. Habitat fragmentation is a major issue in the region, there is a need to develop a strategy to enhance connectivity and develop corridors between areas. There is an opportunity in the formulation of the RSES to introduce a region wide green infrastructure framework to support and deliver green infrastructure strategies and deliver the principles of green infrastructure at a county and settlement level.

Key questions:

- What are the key strategic cultural assets in our region?
- Is there potential for more collaboration to identify funding opportunities for the development of our natural and cultural assets?
- How do we provide for increased population growth in our region, balanced with the need to protect our natural and wild areas?
- How can we fully realise the potential of amenity based tourism, while ensuring that recreational pressures don't lead to biodiversity and habitat loss?

Tourism

Fáilte Ireland has identified that our landscape is the key driver for the promotion of Ireland's tourism, followed by its people, its safe environment and its range of attractions.

Research has identified niche areas such as food, heritage and cycling tourism which can be built into unique tourism products for each of the four regional tourism brands, three of which; Dublin – a breath of fresh air, The Ancient East and the forthcoming Midlands brand, are based in our region.

There is identified market potential in the development of tourism greenways on state owned lands, for the promotion of rural development as well as active lifestyles, as seen with the success of the Great Western Greenway and the Waterford Greenway in terms of local job creation and revitalisation of stop off towns. The Department of Transport Tourism and Sport have published a Draft Greenway Strategy for Ireland, focused on developing the recreation and tourism potential of canal towpaths, abandoned railways, disused military roads and other non-motorised routes.

Within the region, there is potential for the development of a coast to coast network of national greenways, including the Royal and Grand Canals and the Barrow Way, with regional water based trails along from Athlone to Mullingar, and the Boyne Valley greenway on the old Kingscourt line. A number of potential local leisure trails include the Dublin Bay Sutton to Sandycove route, the Dodder Greenway and Tolka River and Carlingford to Newry. A co-ordinated approach is needed to identify scenic routes, with key attractions, food and tourism offer, coupled with infrastructure investment in the creation of safe segregated pathways, which may also have the benefit in promoting active travel among local populations.

Key questions:

- What are the key strategic cultural assets in our region to promote tourism?
- How can we develop a heritage based approach to renewal and tourism?



Species and Habitat Protected Areas

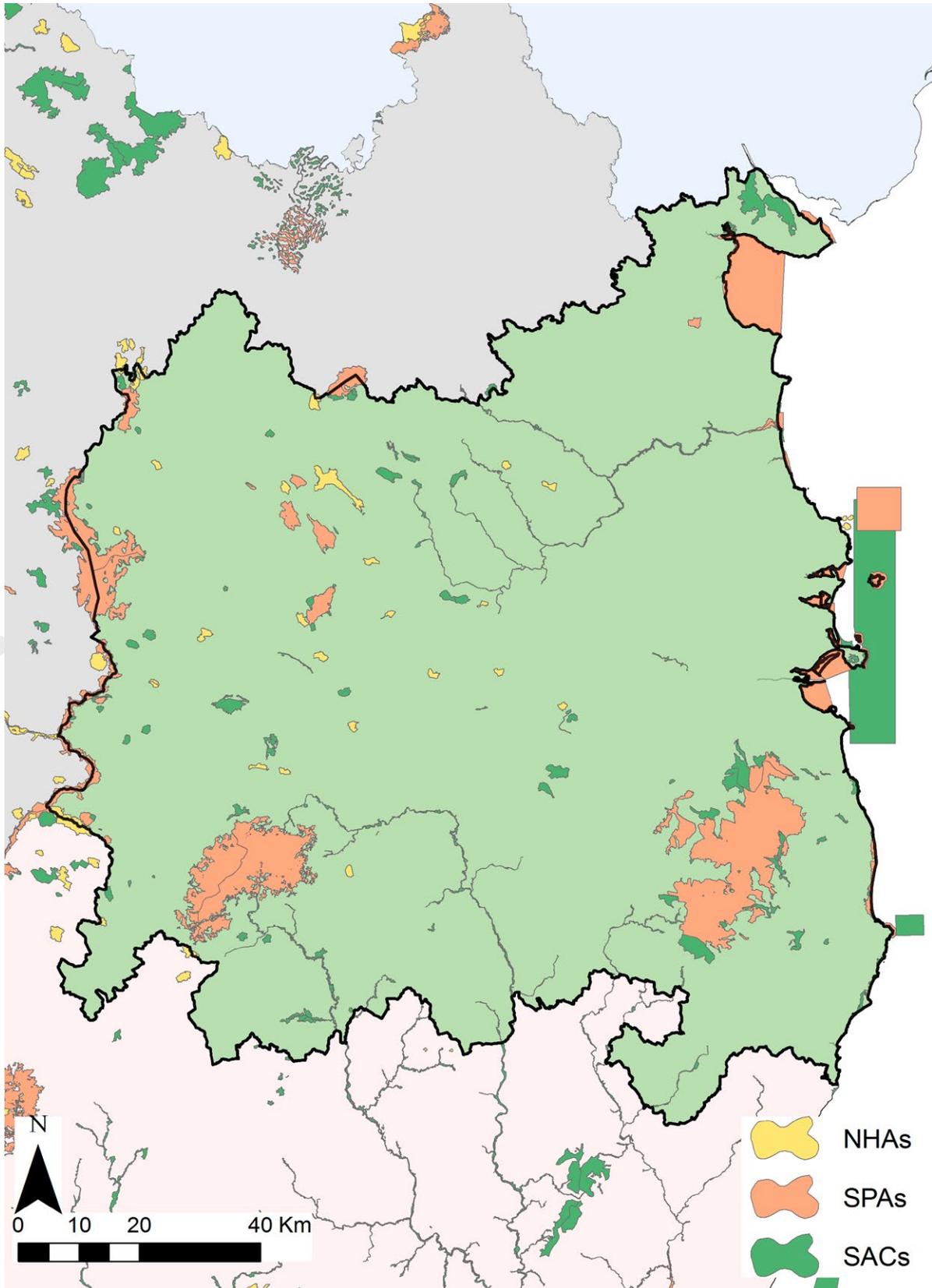


Figure 5.2 Environmentally Sensitive and Protected Areas

6. Infrastructure & Climate Change

High-quality infrastructure is an important element of a modern society and economy, it provides essential functions and services that support societal, economic and environmental systems at local, European and national levels.

It strengthens economic growth through enhancing efficiency, productivity and competitiveness, it creates sustainable and attractive places. It also underpins social cohesion through providing vital facilities for people in the form of schools, public transport, healthcare and housing.

The NPF will be intrinsically linked to a new 10 year National Investment Plans, meaning that the implementation of the NPF will be fully supported by the Governments Investment Strategy for capital investment. The actual choice of investment decisions in areas such as transport, water, wastewater/ flooding, waste, climate action, broadband/ telecommunications, energy, health, education, community and tourism will be spatially led.

It has been a particular issue that the relationship between infrastructure and land-use in Ireland is such that infrastructure led development has been driven by market considerations, because infrastructural investment has followed development and population, in a development led environment

In some instances, the rapid growth of small settlements has resulted in development at a scale and pace that has challenged the capacity of services and has led to requirements for new infrastructure, facilities and services, and a resulting impact on the local environment. Conversely in other settlements, existing services and infrastructure have become underutilised or redundant, serving diminishing and in some cases ageing populations, providing a poor return on capital investment.

If unaddressed critical constraints around the supply of serviced land for housing in Dublin, including water, drainage, public transport, the M50 and the road network serving Dublin are not addressed, this will likely lead to development pressure for cheaper greenfield peripheral sites in more remote locations, resulting in a long term burden on the state for further services provision.

Infrastructure provision has to be adaptable to the impacts of climate change and that future infrastructure investments are climate proofed as well as developing the potential of green infrastructure and environmental networks that provide ecosystem services, to complement more traditional infrastructures.

Public Transport

Land use and transport are critical interlinked policy tools that need to work together to better realise economic success, environmental protection and quality of life. There is a need to reduce demands on our travel systems and invest in the provision of improved services where it is most required, and can provide the greatest return. This has to be balanced with the increasing commuting demand, due to divergence of where people live and work, and the environmental impact of travel use from greenhouse gas emissions.

The purpose of the National Transport Authority Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035 is "To contribute to the economic, social and cultural progress of the Greater Dublin Area by providing for the efficient, effective and sustainable movement of people and goods." This Strategy provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades and is consistent with the current RPGs for the GDA and will be a key policy determinant in the RSES for the region. The GDA transport strategy will have to be reviewed on foot of adoption of the RSES. There will also be a requirement to introduce a transport strategy for the whole of the region with the remit of the RSES.

Public transport is only a viable transport option where there is sufficient critical mass, to allow reasonable competition with the private car, and it is accepted that those areas with less accessibility to Dublin may not achieve the sufficient critical mass. However these areas could benefit from investment in the local road network and in soft mode infrastructure to facilitate mobility.

There has been significant investment in the rail infrastructure in the region and much of the current planning policy in the region is supportive of development along rail base corridors and around rail nodes. In order to realise this investment strategic growth should be focused along these corridors and investment in several key projects can unlock capacity along all aspects of the network throughout the region.

Road

There is an extensive radial road network from Dublin and the advent of the motorway part of this network has generated significant growth along these corridors over the past few decades, based on accessibility to the capital. There is a poor north - south network in the region, this has exacerbated the demand placed on the national motorway network, and could be relieved by investment in key routes that would improve north - south and intra-regional connectivity.

Congestion on the motorway network and the sprawl of the metropolitan area of Dublin into the surrounding region has resulted in the M50 serving local and commuter trips in addition to the strategic trips necessary to support the Irish economy. There is limited scope to increase capacity along the existing M50 network, and trip numbers are now at an all-time high level. As the economy continues to grow traffic volumes are likely to increase in future leading to more congestion. Private car use is closely linked to economic development, decoupling private car use from economic development is a major challenge facing the region.

Ports and Airports

Dublin is the global gateway for the country, Dublin Airport accounted for 84.6% of all air passengers in the county in 2016. The number of passengers has increased year on year to reach 27.78 million in 2016 (11.3% increase) and is forecast to increase again in 2017 as Dublin Airport recorded an extra 1.3 million passengers in the first nine months of the year.

Dublin Port is the largest in the country handling almost 50% of all trade in Ireland and growth of 25% over the last four years. In 2016 there was a record throughput of 34.9 million gross tonnes.

These high figures represent the resurgence of economic growth in Ireland but also place demands on the infrastructure of these facilities, the wider supporting infrastructure and the receiving environment.

Water

Irish Water have identified key projects for the region, at a national scale it is accepted that water supply for the wider Dublin area is at critical levels of demand and to facilitate further growth, prioritisation of water supply should occur specifically the Water Supply Project for the Eastern and Midland Region. This is key for the region as the benefiting corridor for the project will provide a new water supply for most of the region and therefore can be a key element of realising potential across the region. There is also economic potential to be realised in water supply capacity and recent experiences of significant economic development proposals being hampered by a lack of supply, or commitment to supply is considered a key blockage in areas realising that economic potential.

There are still a significant number of settlements in the region that are not compliant with urban waste water directive notices including several settlements of a significant scale as identified by the EPA. This has proven to be a barrier to some key urban settlements in the region not realising their stated growth potential and demonstrates the impact underinvestment in wastewater infrastructure can have on the receiving environment.

Diffuse (non-point) sources of water pollution are an issue in the region as they impact more on water bodies than point sources and are difficult to assess. Agriculture in particular has a major influence on water quality. Policies such as Food Wise 2025 aim to increase primary output in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors which will in turn place additional pressure on water systems.

Waste

The return to growth of the construction industry in Ireland is leading to increased waste volumes. In addition the fact that only 81% of households in the region have a waste collection service is an issue. These waste streams are a huge potential resource and, if improved waste separation, collection and management is implemented, could provide ample raw material for transition toward a circular economy model. The Regional Waste Offices are geographically aligned with the Regional Assemblies, the RSES will seek to support the implementation of the Regional Waste Plans for the region.

Communications

Access to broadband in the region is improving but remains uneven. Many rural and peripheral areas of the region are poorly served by broadband, there is a need to increase the rate of investment in broadband, in particular in rural areas. The National Broadband Plan represents a good first step towards digital inclusion in Ireland, and will be important for Ireland's future social and economic development. This is a fast moving and evolving infrastructure, future communications networks and technology will have to be a consideration for changing work practices and emerging economic models.

Energy

Overreliance on non-indigenous supplies of energy is still a major issue for the region. Security of energy supply and climate change are important drivers of energy policy in the region, there are potential synergies between these two issues. To meet our energy targets, we need to better leverage natural resources to increase our share of renewable energy. There is an established tradition of energy production in the Midland counties by state agencies, however national environmental policies are dictating the wind down of traditional fossil fuel powered stations, such as peat fired power plants in these counties.

Improving energy efficiency is vital in order to reduce energy consumption while maintaining or improving economic growth. Policies are needed urgently to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation. Renewables are becoming increasingly competitive, and the region has ample resources of wind, solar and ocean energy. To date the region has already provided a significant amount of renewable energy projects, however due to a lack of coordinated national policy some windfarm developments have progressed in an uncoordinated manner. This is beginning to be replicated in the development proposals for large scale solar energy projects in the region.

Over the next ten years there is a predicted growth in energy demand of between 11% and 30%, mainly due to additional data centres. Extra generating capacity will likely be required to accommodate this demand, particularly in the region. Increased connectivity with other grids is needed. Projects such as the North South interconnector are of great importance for the region.

Social infrastructure

Provision of education, healthcare, childcare and other social facilities has not matched the pace of growth and resultant demand in the region. This required redress in some areas as poverty and social exclusion are important issues in the region. There is a risk that poverty and social exclusion will increase further as house prices and the cost of living rise. There is an opportunity in the RSES to combine the key stakeholders in the provision of these services to ensure that the demands of a changing and increasing population are met through the RSES.

Climate change

Increases in GHG emissions are largely due to fossil fuel usage, although land use change, deforestation and agriculture provide significant contributions. With current practices, GHG emissions are likely to continue to grow, leading to further global warming. The region is home to a wide range of bogs and peatlands which have an important role as a carbon sink. More work needs to be done in Ireland in the area of local climate change adaptation. Heat waves and the frequency of heavy rain events are predicted to increase, requiring changes to land use planning to mitigate the worst of these effects. There is a need to increase resilience in the face of global climate change, to better understand and measure GHGs at a spatial level, and to tailor meaningful policy responses.

Key Questions:

- How can we ensure that infrastructure is planned and not just demand focused?
- Should infrastructure provision and services be focused on key areas or dispersed across the region
- How can we support a greater return on infrastructure investment by the state?
- How can the Regional Assembly greater align infrastructure providers with wider strategic and spatial policy?
- What can be done to reduce the environment impact of the receiving environment from our use of infrastructure, and a transition to a low carbon society?
- What are the key infrastructure bottlenecks that can 'unlock' key sites and help the region achieve sustainable growth in cities, towns and rural areas?
- What are the key drivers to ensure a transition to more sustainable transport usage and patterns?
- What investment is required to facilitate the sustainable growth of our airports and ports?
- How can we balance the increasing energy demands with the step change away from a reliance on fossil fuels?

7. Summary of Key Questions

What should our region look like in 2030?

1. How can we encourage better alignment between population growth, location of residential development and employment?
2. How can we plan for healthier and more attractive places, by 2030?
3. How can economic, environment and social dimensions be approached in the RSES to ensure the delivery of sustainable regional development?
4. How best can the RSES address regional disparities to produce a more sustainable, balanced and competitive region?
5. What are the key strategic natural assets we need to protect in our region?
6. How do we address the challenge of adequate water supply and waste water disposal capacity to ensure the growth potential of our larger urban centres?
7. How can we build a strong cultural identity and brand for our region?
8. What are the key infrastructure bottlenecks that can 'unlock' key sites and help the region achieve sustainable growth in cities, towns and rural areas?
9. How do we address the demands of climate change on our region?
10. How do we measure the success of the RSES?



8. Next Steps

How to make a submission to RSES:

1. **Online;**
www.emra.ie/rses

2. **Email;** to
rses@emra.ie

3. **Post;** Written submission
to the following address:

Eastern & Midland
Regional Assembly
3rd Floor North,
Ballymun Civic Centre
Main Street
Ballymun
Dublin 9
D09 C8P5

*Please make your submission
via one medium only, with
electronic or hard copy.*

All submissions must include the following:

- Your name and details of any organisation, community or representative group, or company you represent
- An address for correspondence
- Your submission on relevant planning issues for the Regional and Spatial Strategy

In order to complete the strategy formulation process you are asked to please make your submission as early as possible. These submissions will be taken into consideration prior to the preparation of the Draft RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region.

At this stage we ask that you consider strategic regional planning and economic development issues. To highlight some of the issues and choices we face in planning for the future, we have prepared a Regional Socio-Economic Profile for our region, at the following link www.emra.ie/maps which may be helpful in making a submission.

Please note:

This initial pre-draft consultation is only the first step in the process of preparing and adopting a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region and that there will be other opportunities later in the process for you or your organisation to further express your views and make additional submissions.

Key stages in the RSES Process

The Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly intends on publishing a Draft RSES Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, and associated environmental reports, in the second quarter of 2018 and this Draft will be placed on public display for at least ten weeks during which time submissions and observations will again be invited.



Figure 8.1. Key Stages in the RSES and parallel Strategic Environmental Assessment Process

Following consideration of observations on the Draft, the Regional Assembly will consider appropriate amendments and will subject the Draft and any proposed amendments to a rigorous environmental assessment process.

Once all of these steps have been taken, the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly will adopt and publish a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region, including a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan for Dublin by the end of 2018.

Once the RSES is adopted by the 38 members of the Regional Assembly, each planning authority and public body within the region will be obliged to review their plans and programmes and consider any variations to those plans and programmes is necessary in order to achieve the objectives of the RSES.



EASTERN & MIDLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

3rd Floor
Ballymun Civic Centre
Main Street
Ballymun
Dublin 9
D09 C8P5

+353 (0) 1 807 4482
www.emra.ie

