LECP Briefing Note for
Sligo County Council
August 2022
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1: Introduction

As outlined in Figure 1, the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) are a part of the overarching policy framework of Project Ireland 2040, which includes the National Planning Framework (NPF), the National Development Plan (NDP), the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and County and City Development Plans.

Within this policy framework, the specific purpose of the LECPs is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support economic and community development within the relevant Local Authority area over the next six-year period,¹ as provided for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014. In doing so, the LECPs are one of the primary mechanisms – at local level – to bring forward relevant actions arising from national and regional strategies and policies that have a local remit.

Figure 1: Policy structure of Project Ireland 2040

Source: Local Economic and Community Plans Guidelines 2021

As noted in the 2021 guidelines of the LECPs – and in line with the Local Government Reform Act 2014 – the LECPs must be consistent with the appropriate RSESs and City and County Development Plans. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, there was a limited level of up-to-date data specifically for the Sligo County Council area, with limitations in this regard credited to the latest Census being delayed due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Although data with respect to Sligo is available from Census 2016, such information is quite dated and the forthcoming Census 2022 results - which are due to be released next year - will provide significant insights to Sligo County Council with respect to the implementation of their Development Plan and their LECP. Considering this policy requirement and mindful of the lack of up-to-date data on Sligo, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has prepared this “LECP Briefing Note”; the purpose of which is to highlight up-to-date county socio-economic indicators that are available and which will help inform the objectives and actions of the LECP. In this regard, this “LECP Briefing Note” outlines the performance and data source of socio-economic indicators related to Sligo in the following three areas, namely:

- Economic indicators
- Quality of life indicators
- Environmental and low carbon economy indicators

It is also important to note that the data that is presented in the “LECP Briefing Note” for Sligo County Council will be available through the “Regional Development Monitor”, which is currently being prepared by the three Regional Assemblies of Ireland in partnership with the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) in Maynooth University.

Specifically, the “Regional Development Monitor” will be available online, free of charge and will monitor around 60 socio-economic indicators under the following four themes, namely:

- Our People and Places
- Our Green and Sustainable Future
- Our Region’s Economy
- Our All-Island Perspective

The majority of socio-economic indicators that will be monitored in the “Regional Development Monitor” meet the following three principles:

- The data is provided by a reliable source
- The data can be updated every year, which allows for annual evaluations outside of the Census
- The data is as up-to-date as possible

In doing so, the “Regional Development Monitor” will be an important online data platform that will monitor national, regional and county trends on key socio-economic indicators and will be a useful policy tool for Local Authorities in preparing their LECPs and monitoring up-to-date trends in their respective Local Authority areas.
2: Regional Strategic Context

The RSES is crafted on the principle that it wants to work collaboratively to deliver effective regional development for all our communities, regardless of administrative boundaries. This means that we need to understand their catchments and their potential and to enable the spatial development opportunities specific to each of the sub-regions.²

The RSES aims to be responsive to trends – such as urbanisation, digitisation and globalisation – whilst also interpreting socio-economic and environment risks by connecting our plans to the United Nation’s (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the EU’s Growth Strategy (including the EU Green Deal) and the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF.

At its core, the RSES recognises the weak urban infrastructure in the Northern and Western Region and that this region has not prospered economically compared to the other two NUTS 2 Regions of Ireland. This is evident from the reclassification of the Northern and Western Region by the European Commission from a ‘More Developed Region’ to a ‘Transition Region’ for the funding period of 2021 to 2027³ with other economic challenges also highlighted in the NWRA’s recent publication ‘A Region in Transition: The Way Forward’⁴. Furthermore, the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development has categorised the region as a “Lagging Region”, which is a region characterised by extremely low growth which is divergent from the rest of its country,⁵ while the European Commission’s 2021 ‘Regional Innovation Scoreboard’ classified the Northern and Western Region as a ‘Moderate Innovator’; the only region on the island of Ireland to hold such a status.⁶

Figure 2: Growth Ambitions of the RSES of the Northern and Western Region

Source: RSES of the Northern and Western Region

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² Sub-regions available via Figure 2 of the RSES: https://www.nwra.ie/pdfs/NWRA-RSES-2020-2032.pdf
Within this context, the RSES responded by adopting a clear strategy that aims to deliver on the key elements known to inform business location choices, namely:

**KEY BUSINESS ELEMENTS**

1. Development of compact urban centres with critical mass in population; encouraging the revitalisation of urban areas and reinhabitation of urban cores.

2. Provision of connectivity and access (including national and international), enabled by physical and technology infrastructures with capacity resilience and quality especially post-Brexit.

3. Establishment of competitive, smart and integrated public transport networks within and between cities and urban areas.

4. Nurturing of world-class infrastructure and competitive services with capacity, resilience and quality.

5. Growing our third level infrastructures, access to skills and research, development and innovation.


7. Co-location or dynamic clustering, enabling connectivity and linkages within and between suppliers and purchasers, between enterprises and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

8. Development of quality of life factors and sense of Place, including harnessing the social, and cultural dimensions of the living experience of communities, including the unique social, linguistic and cultural dimensions of our Gaeltacht communities.

Furthermore, the RSES has also introduced the concept of a ‘Growth Framework’ that links strategic and operational challenges with prioritised capital interventions. The ‘Growth Framework’ will be the basis for determining metrics, linking with NSOs and assessing the region’s actual contribution to the UN’s SDGs. The Growth framework incorporates five ‘Growth Ambitions’ that define each priority and how they are mutually complementary with a focus on ‘People and Places’. In this regard, our ambition is for a region that is “Vibrant”, “Natural”, “Connected”, “Inclusive” and a “Great Place to Live”, consolidated by a strong settlement strategy focusing on “People and Places”.

It brings a new “place-based” approach that involves tapping into the economic potential that remains unused, so that all parts of the Northern and Western Region – whether they be cities, towns, or their rural hinterlands – can contribute to national development.

“The LECPs of the Northern and Western Region have an opportunity to deliver on the vision and objectives outlined within the RSES.”
3: Sligo Economic Indicators

Section 3 of this briefing note analyses economic indicators, specifically focusing on trends in the following areas:

- Disposable income per capita
- Enterprise base
- COVID-19 employment impact
- Employment supported by Enterprise Agencies
- Human capital profile
- Project Ireland 2040 funds
- Sectoral specialisms

3.1: Disposable Income Per Capita

A key indication of the economic wellbeing of a geographical area is the level of disposable income per head of population, which is essentially the average person’s income after deducting taxes and social contributions and including social benefits.

As evident from Figure 3, average disposable income per head of population in Sligo was estimated to be €21,531 in 2020, which was below the State average of €23,615. Although average disposable income levels in Sligo have recovered from the previous financial crisis, it should be noted that the gap in disposable income levels between Sligo and the State average has progressively increased over the past number of years, rising from a gap of €619 per head of population in 2012 to €2,084 in 2020.

3.2: Enterprise Base

The vibrancy of a geographical area’s commercial environment is a significant factor in determining its economic wellbeing. International institutions such as the OECD have stated that the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals can only be achieved if countries manage to build up a strong enterprise base – particularly SMEs – thereby highlighting their importance to regional economic development.7

Commercial vacancy rates provide a general indication of the level of commercial vibrancy and activity within a geographical area. Based on GeoDirectory data, the commercial vacancy rate in Sligo stood at 16.3 per cent as of December 2021, which was 4.6 percentage points higher than the State average of 11.7 per cent. In terms of the higher level towns and villages that have been highlighted in the current Sligo County Development Plan, Collooney had the highest commercial vacancy rate in Sligo as of December 2021, with a rate of 27 per cent. This was followed by Sligo Town (22.1%), Grange (18%), Ballymote (16.7%), Tubbercurry (13.5%) and Ballisodare (12.5%), with below average rates recorded in Inniscrone (10.7%), Strandhill (6.7%) and Coolaney (4%), as evident from Figure 4.

7 https://oecd-development-matters.org/2017/04/03/unlocking-the-potential-of-smes-for-the-sdgs/
Figure 3: Disposable income per capita for Sligo and the State Average, 2000-2020*

Source: CSO. *2020 is based on an estimate from the CSO

Figure 4: Commercial vacancy rates of the higher-level towns and villages of Sligo, December 2021

Source: GeoDirectory

Data provided by GeoDirectory through a data license agreement with the 3 Regional Assemblies of Ireland
3.3: COVID-19 Employment Impact

As a result of the public health measures needed to control the spread of COVID-19, Ireland’s labour market was severely impacted, with the State’s unemployment rate rising substantially in a short period of time. Inevitably such developments also severely affected the labour market of Sligo.

To evaluate the extent of this impact, Figure 5 shows the number of people in Sligo that were either in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) or the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), using CSO data. The number of residents in Sligo in receipt of either the PUP, TWSS or the EWSS peaked at 12,168 as of the 3rd of May 2020, with the number of recipients in Sligo progressively falling between February 2021 and April 2022.

The latest available figures show that 2,607 people in Sligo were in receipt of either the PUP, TWSS or the EWSS as of the 24th of April 2022.

**Figure 5:** The number of people in Sligo on the Live Register, that were in receipt of the PUP or supported by the TWSS / EWSS, March 2020 – April 2022

Source: CSO

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9 [https://data.cso.ie/table/LRW14](https://data.cso.ie/table/LRW14)
3.4: Employment Supported by Enterprise Agencies

The total number of IDA Ireland client companies based in Sligo amounted to 29 in 2021, representing 1.7 per cent of the total stock of IDA Ireland client companies. This implies that Sligo accounted for the second highest share of IDA Ireland client companies in the Northern and Western Region, with Galway recording the highest share in the region at 5.6 per cent in 2021. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of companies operating within Sligo rose, increasing from 24 IDA Ireland client companies in 2011 to 29 in 2021. In terms of direct employment, IDA Ireland client companies based in Sligo employed 2,732 people in 2021, with net job growth in every year since 2018.

Figure 6: The number of jobs supported from IDA Ireland client companies located in Sligo, 2010-2021.

![Bar chart showing the number of jobs supported from IDA Ireland client companies located in Sligo, 2010-2021.](source: IDA Ireland)

Similar trends were also evident with respect to client companies that are supported by Enterprise Ireland. In 2021, a total of 1,966 jobs were supported by Enterprise Ireland client companies that were located in Sligo. Following Enterprise Ireland's new strategy, a revision of the population of companies included in the Annual Employment Survey was undertaken, including companies recently acquired or those whose strategy or need to engage with Enterprise Ireland had changed.

As a result of this revision, the changes to the baseline survey population reduced the total employment in client companies supported by Enterprise Ireland in 2021. Due to these changes, the 2021 employment data for client companies supported by Enterprise Ireland was not comparable to the corresponding data in previous years. Nevertheless, direct employment in client companies supported by Enterprise Ireland and based in Sligo rose between 2010 and 2020, rising from 1,519 people employed in 2010 to 1,992 in 2020. Furthermore, the number of people employed in client companies supported by the Sligo Local Enterprise Office amounted to 930 in 2020.

https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2022-02-08/175/
3.5: Human Capital Profile

Human capital is central to Ireland’s economic success and social development, with the availability of well-educated, skilled and knowledgeable citizens acting a fundamental driver of regional economic development and social progress.

Amongst other factors, human capital is generally nurtured through the provision of high quality graduates from Higher Education and Further Education and Training (FET) institutions, with the latest data showing positive trends for Sligo. According to the Higher Education Authority, a total of 1,042 students – that were originally from Sligo – graduated from Higher Education Institutes in Ireland in 2020, representing growth of 2.4 per cent relative to the base year of 2018. Of the 1,042 graduates that were originally from Sligo, 29 per cent graduated from IT Sligo.

In conjunction to this, the Department of Education also provides data on the number of FET beneficiaries who are enrolled in each Education and Training Board (ETB) in Ireland. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of FET beneficiaries registered in the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB amounted to 16,734 in 2019, with this figure dropping to 11,738 in 2020, with the impact of COVID-19 being credited to this year-on-year decline.

![Figure 7: The number of FET beneficiaries in the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB, 2014-2020](source)

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**Beneficiaries metric records an individual learner based on the number of FET courses they have been registered in the declared year.**

**Consultations with the Department of Education suggest that this decline can be attributed to the fact that some courses simply couldn’t be held remotely, or some users didn’t want to learn online.**

**Data provided to the Northern and Western Regional Assembly through a private request to the Department of Education**
3.6: Project Ireland 2040 Funds

There are four designated funds that aim to support the implementation of the vision and objectives of Project Ireland 2040, namely:

- The Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF)
- The Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF)
- The Climate Action Fund
- The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund

In terms of the URDF, a total of €57.3 million has been allocated to Sligo under Calls 1 and 2 of the URDF, with the specific projects supported outlined in Table 1. Sligo accounted for 3.5 per cent of the national allocation of the URDF and the county accounted for 27.1 per cent of the Northern and Western Region’s total allocation under this fund as of July 2022.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Project</th>
<th>Funding Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Garavogue Bridge &amp; Approach Roads Scheme</td>
<td>€6,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Connell Street Enhancement</td>
<td>€2,134,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo Cultural Plaza</td>
<td>€750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo Public Realm</td>
<td>€560,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of Sligo City Public Realm Plan</td>
<td>€19,157,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Campus - Sligo Cultural and Learn Hub</td>
<td>€28,683,673</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government

With respect to the RRDF, €2.6 million has been allocated to projects located in Sligo between 2018 and 2022, with a year-on-year breakdown provided in Figure 8. Between 2018 and 2022, Sligo accounted for 0.9 per cent of the national allocation under the calls from the RRDF and 2.2 per cent of the Northern and Western Region’s total allocation under this fund as of June 2022.

Figure 8: The level of investment provided under the RRDF for projects located in Sligo, 2018-2022*

Source: Department of Rural and Community Development. *As of June 2022
At the time of writing, data with respect to the geographical distribution of funding of the Climate Action Fund and the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund was not available.

3.7: Sectoral Specialisms

On a regional level – and based on stakeholder consultations and research involved in the development of the RSES – the key sectors of the Northern and Western Region include:

- Tourism
- Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Economy
- Marine and Blue Economy
- ICT and Life Sciences
- Agri-Tech and Agri-Food
- Retail
- Advance Manufacturing and Engineering

These high-level sectors have an array of assets, skillsets and capabilities which are instrumental to supporting the Northern and Western Region’s economy, and whose growth will be key to achieving balanced regional development in line with the NPF and the RSES.

Taking these regional sectoral strengths into account, it is also important to identify and provide more detail on the sub-sectoral specialisms that exist in Sligo. Using Census 2016 NACE Code employment data, and Location Quotients (LQ) scores, this sub-section provides greater detail of the sub-sectoral specialisms that existed in Sligo at the time of Census 2016. It should be noted that LQ scores act as a method in identifying sectors that are specialized in a regional or local economy, relative to the national norm. For example, in this case:

- An LQ score of 1.0 shows that a geographical area has the same proportion of employment involved in a sub-sector, relative to the national norm.
- An LQ score greater than 1.0 shows that a geographical area has an above average proportion of employment involved in a sub-sector, relative to the national norm.
- An LQ score greater than 1.25 shows that a geographical area has a strong specialization in a sub-sector.
- A LQ score lower than 1 shows that a geographical area has a below average proportion of employment involved in a sub-sector, relative to the national norm.

Using Census 2016 sub-sectoral employment data, Sligo’s LQ Scores that were greater than 1 have been categorised by their respective 1 digit NACE Code and presented in Table 2, thereby showing the sub-sectoral specialisms that existed in the county at the time of the Census. As evident from Table 2, a wide range of sub-sectoral specialisms have been identified across the high-level sectors (1 digit NACE Codes) in Sligo. For example, in the Manufacturing sector, sub-sectoral specialisms that recorded high LQ scores (i.e. greater than 1.25) in Sligo included:

- Manufacture of Rubber and Plastic Products (LQ score of 4.37)
- Manufacture of Medical and Dental Instruments and Supplies (2.21)
- Manufacture of Tobacco Products (2.05)
- Manufacture of Pharmaceuticals, Medicinal Chemicals and Botanical Products (1.68)
- Processing and preserving of fish and fish products (1.64)
• Manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers (1.62)
• Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment (1.48)
• All other manufacturing n.e.c (1.41)

Outside of the Manufacturing sector, other strong specialisms in Sligo were also evident across a wide range sub-sectors as evident from Table 2.

### Table 2: LQ Scores of Sligo for the sub-sectors with a score greater than 1, by their appropriate high-level sector (i.e. 1 digit NACE Code), Census 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Digit NACE Code (sky blue label) and sub-sectors (white label)</th>
<th>LQ Score (Employment)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong Sub-Sectoral Specialism (LQ Score greater than 1.25)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming (farming of animals, mixed farming)</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing of crops, fruits, plants, flowers and vegetables</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing and preserving of fish and fish products</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of bakery and farinaceous products</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of beverages</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of tobacco products</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of wood and products of wood and cork, except furniture</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of pharmaceuticals, medicinal chemicals and botanical products</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of rubber and plastic products</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of medical and dental instruments and supplies</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other manufacturing n.e.c.</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Above Average Sub-Sectoral Specialism (LQ Score greater than 1 but less than or equal to 1.25)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demolition and site preparation</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building completion and finishing</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale of household goods</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail sale of hardware, paints and glass in specialised stores</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail sale of electrical household appliances in specialised stores</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail sale of furniture, lighting equipment and household articles n.e.c.</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail sale of footwear and leather goods in specialised stores</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and food service activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and similar accommodation</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other provision of short-stay accommodation</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants and mobile food service activities</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverage serving activities</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Professional, scientific and technical activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical testing and analysis</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary activities</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Public administration and defence; compulsory social security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garda Síochána</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other public administration; compulsory social security</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary education</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Human health and social work activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospital activities</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical practice activities</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential care and social work activities</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Arts, entertainment and recreation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative arts and entertainment activities</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other service activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities of membership organisations</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdressing and other beauty treatment</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral and related activities</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical well-being activities</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other service activities n.e.c.</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Source: Northern and Western Regional Assembly calculations using CSO Census data

The Census 2022 Summary Report will be published in April 2023, with further results expected to be published up to December 2023. These results will examine a range of topics such as population, housing, health, education and employment.
4: Sligo Quality of Life Indicators

Section 4 of the “LECP Briefing Note” analyses quality of life indicators, specifically focusing on trends in the following areas:

- Population growth
- First buyer affordability
- Renter affordability
- New dwelling completions
- Residential vacancy
- Homelessness
- Litter pollution
- Library service usage

4.1: Population Growth

According to the preliminary results of the CSO’s Census of Population 2022, the population of Sligo amounted to 69,819 people in April 2022. Relative to the previous Census, the population of Sligo expanded by 6.5 per cent, which was below the corresponding national growth rate of 7.6 per cent. Of the 79 Electoral Divisions that are located in Sligo, 58 recorded population growth between 2016 and 2022, with 21 Electoral Divisions either recording a decline or zero growth in population during this time. Figure 9 shows the Electoral Divisions that recorded an above average population growth rate, with the highest growth rates recorded in Templeboy South / Mullagheruse (25.1%), Dromore (22.8%), Lakeview (18.1%), Ballynashee (17.8%), Coolaney (17.2%), Sligo North (15.4%), Collooney (15.3%), Temple (13.5%) and Cuilmore (13%).

Figure 9: Electoral Divisions of Sligo that recorded above average population growth (2016-2022)

Source: CSO

4.2: First-Time Buyer Affordability

Housing affordability research recommends that households keep their housing costs to 30 per cent of their net income, as anything above this ratio begins to affect a household’s ability to save and cover other essential costs. By adopting a similar methodology to previous studies on housing affordability, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has estimated the average mortgage repayment to net income ratio for first time buyers located in the Northern and Western Region.

The Assembly’s methodology for calculating the average mortgage repayment to net income ratio for first time buyers is outlined in Appendix A. In this regard, Sligo recorded an average mortgage repayment to net income ratio for first time buyers of 16 per cent in 2020, which was below the affordability mark of 30 per cent and the corresponding State average of 29 per cent.

4.3: Renter Affordability

The provision of affordable rental accommodation will be a key component to supporting the quality of life offering of Sligo. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly has estimated the average rental payment to net income ratio for renters located in Sligo and the methodology involved in calculating this ratio has been outlined in Appendix A. In this regard, Sligo registered an average rental payment to net income ratio for renters of 26 per cent in 2020, which was below the standard affordability mark of 30 per cent.

4.4: New Dwelling Completions

The delivery of new housing will be fundamental to enhancing the quality of life offering of Sligo. Figure 11 shows the absolute number of new dwelling completions in Sligo, between 2016— which represents the base year of the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the Northern and Western Region – and 2021, which represents the latest full year dataset. In 2016, 85 new
dwellings were completed in Sligo, with completions rising to a recent high of 178 in 2020, before falling to 144 in 2021, as can be seen from Figure 11.

Source: CSO

Relative to the previous year, new dwelling completions in Sligo were down 19.1 per cent relative to the previous year. Notably, this decline in new dwelling completions in 2021 was evident in the majority of CSO defined settlements in Sligo, with most towns or villages either recording a decline or zero growth in completions in 2021. Only 5 towns and villages in Sligo recorded year-on-year growth in new dwelling completions in 2021, as evident from Figure 12.

Source: CSO. *Settlement is located includes areas in Sligo and Mayo
4.5: Residential Vacancy

Residential vacancy rates provide a general indication of the level of housing activity and vibrancy within a geographical area. Based on GeoDirectory data, the residential vacancy and dereliction rate in Sligo stood at 10.4 per cent as of September 2020, which was higher than the State average of 4.9 per cent. In absolute terms, the number of vacant or derelict residential properties in Sligo amounted to 3,280 as of September 2020.

4.6: Homelessness

According to data from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the absolute number of adults accessing homeless services in Sligo has progressively risen over the past number of years, rising from 21 in 2016 to a recent high of 47 in 2021, before dropping to 45 in 2022.

Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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24 Data provided by GeoDirectory through a data license agreement with the 3 Regional Assemblies of Ireland
25 May data (2016-2021)
gov.ie - Homelessness data (www.gov.ie)
4.7: Litter Pollution

The National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) – through their Local Authority performance indicator report\(^{27}\) – evaluates the environmental performance of Local Authorities by carrying out a variety of surveys. One of these surveys examines the level of litter pollution across each Local Authority area, with the degree of pollution evaluated across five different categorises, namely:

- Unpolluted or litter free
- Slightly polluted
- Moderately polluted
- Significantly polluted
- Grossly polluted.

As evident from Figure 14, the national median figure for areas classified as being unpolluted was 22 per cent in 2020, with Sligo recording a corresponding ratio of 29 per cent. The percentage of Sligo that was classified as slightly polluted was 52 per cent in 2020, which was lower than the national median of 62 per cent. Furthermore, the percentage of Sligo that was considered moderately polluted was 19 per cent, which was 2 percentage points higher than the national median of 17 per cent.

Figure 14: Percentage of geographical area within the 5 levels of litter pollution, 2020

Source: NOAC. Some percentages shares do not sum to 100% due to rounding issues

4.8: Library Service Usage

According to data from NOAC,\(^{28}\) the average number of library visits per head of population was 1.05 in Ireland in 2020. This was higher than the corresponding average for Sligo which was 0.86 library visits per head of population.


Section 5 of the “LECP Briefing Note” analyses indicators related to the environment and the transition to a low carbon economy, specifically focusing on trends in the following areas:

- Wastewater capacity
- Ecological status of rivers and lakes
- Electrical vehicles
- EV charging infrastructure
- Wind energy
- Building energy ratings
- Afforestation

5.1: Wastewater Capacity

The provision of wastewater infrastructure will be crucial to supporting future population and employment growth in towns and villages across Sligo. Based on Irish Water data, 29 of Sligo’s CSO defined settlements were operating above its capacity in 2021. In this regard, wastewater capacity and the load that is received is defined in terms of population equivalents. 30 Currently 4 of Sligo’s CSO defined settlements are not compliant with Waste Water Discharge Licence emission limit values but are capable of achieving at least Urban Waste Water standards.

5.2: Ecological Status of Rivers and Lakes

Amongst other things, the LECPs provide an opportunity for Local Authorities to support projects that can enhance and protect the ecosystem of local communities, with these ecosystems among the most widely applicable, economically viable and effective tools in protecting and growing the biodiversity profile of Sligo.

Support in this regard could not be more important as the EPA’s “Water Quality in Ireland 2013-2018” 31 publication found that 53 per cent of river water bodies in Ireland were considered to have a satisfactory ecological status (i.e. high or good river water quality), with the corresponding ratio for Sligo being 73 per cent. The EPA also monitored the ecological status of monitored lake water bodies between 2013 and 2018, with 50 per cent of lake water bodies in Ireland recording a satisfactory ecological status, with the corresponding ratio for Sligo being 43 per cent.

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29 Data provided to the Northern and Western Regional Assembly through a private request
5.3: Electrical Vehicles (EVs)

The uptake of EVs will be a major factor in transitioning the Northern and Western Region to a low carbon economy. Based on the latest full year statistics, the absolute number of EVs licensed in Sligo was 105 in 2021. EVs in Sligo accounted for only 5.2 per cent of all new and second-hand private cars licensed for the first time, which was marginally below the national average of 5.3 per cent in 2021.

Encouragingly, EVs in Sligo accounted for 12.9 per cent of all new and second-hand private cars licensed for the first time between January and May 2022, which was above the corresponding State average of 10.2 per cent.

5.4: EV Charging Infrastructure

The availability of EV charging infrastructure in Sligo – amongst other things – will support the widespread adoption of EVs in the county. Up-to-date data is available through “Open Charge Map”, which provides information on the number of public and private EV bays / stations and through the ESB’s real time map.

5.5: Renewable Energy

Among the most important measures in the Climate Action Plan is to increase the proportion of renewable electricity to up to 80 per cent by 2030, with the uptake of technologies with respect to wind and solar energy considered instrumental to delivering on this target.

At the moment, wind energy is considered the dominant renewable energy source, and Sligo had an installed wind energy capacity of 86 MW as of October 2021, representing 2 per cent of the total installed wind energy capacity in the State, with a total of 5 wind farms located in the county. As a result of this installed capacity, the wind energy sector currently makes a significant contribution to the commercial rates of Sligo County Council. Based on data from Wind Energy Ireland, €843,847 of commercial rates were payable to Sligo County Council as a result of the onshore wind energy sector, accounting for 6.3 per cent of total rates accumulated by the County Council in 2020.

The generation of renewable energy through solar panel technologies will also be an important element in delivering on the objectives of the Climate Action Plan, however – at the time of writing – data on the level of energy produced by solar panels by county was not available.

5.6: Building Energy Ratings

Assisting households and businesses in improving their Building Energy Ratings (BER) will support the region’s transition to a low carbon economy. Between 2009 and Q1-2022, 21 per cent of the residential dwellings audited in Ireland registered a BER between “A” and “B”. Of the audited residential dwellings based in Sligo, 16 per cent recorded a BER between “A” and “B”.

Likewise, between 2009 and Q1-2022, 15 per cent of non-residential dwellings audited in Ireland registered a BER between “A” and “B”. Of the audited non-residential dwellings based in Sligo, 11 per cent recorded a BER between “A” and “B”.

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32 Data sourced privately from the CSO
33 Charge Point Map (esb.ie)
34 https://openchargemap.org/site
36 Data sourced from Wind Energy Ireland
37 Information sourced from Wind Energy Ireland and prepared by Eamon Halpin & Co
38 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/dber/domesticbuildingenergyratingsquarter12022/
5.7: Afforestation

Figure 15 displays the total afforestation in Hectares (ha) in Sligo for each year between 2007 and 2021. Having reached a high of an afforestation area of 382 ha in 2014, the level of afforestation in Sligo has progressively fallen, dropping to 92 ha in 2021, with the size of afforestation dropping in every year since 2016.

Figure 15: Total Afforestation (ha) in Sligo, 2007 to 2021

![Graph showing total afforestation in Sligo from 2007 to 2021](https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-aa/afforestationarea2021/)

Source: CSO

According to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the total amount of forest area in Sligo amounted to 22,167 ha in 2022, with forest cover amounting to 12.1 per cent in the county.

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6: Areas of Consideration for the LECP

In preparing the LECP, consideration should be given to the RSES of the Northern and Western Region\(^4\) which includes a suite of Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) for the region. Section 6 of this briefing note highlights the RPOs that this LECP could potentially support, with these objectives categorised by the appropriate chapter headings in the RSES, namely:

- Chapter 3 – People and Places
- Chapter 4 – Vibrant Region
- Chapter 5 – Natural Region
- Chapter 6 – Connected Region
- Chapter 7 – Inclusive Region

6.1: People and Places (Chapter 3)

- **RPOs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3.**
  In relation to RPOs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3, how can the LECP enhance:
  
  1. The social, cultural and environmental quality and offering within the Sligo Regional Growth Centre, so that it supports the growth of the built-up footprint of the urban area.

- **RPOs 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.10.**
  In relation to the above RPOs, how can the LECP deliver on the following:
  
  2. Increase the percentage of buildings with “A” or “B” Building Energy Ratings.
  3. Develop green infrastructure

Furthermore, can the LECP support the following RPOs for the Sligo Regional Growth Centre, namely:

- **RPO 3.7.47** – Promote local heritage and culture to deliver high-quality cultural and tourism products of regional and national significance.
- **RPO 3.7.51** – Continue the expansion of cycleways and walking routes throughout the urban area and outwards to the satellite villages of Ballysadare, Strandhill and Rosses Point, linking into established and planned recreational trails such as Union Wood, Knocknarea etc.
- **RPO 3.7.55** – To transform Sligo into a ‘Smart City’, able to provide advanced digital services to citizens and businesses.
- **RPO 3.7.57** – Seek an increase in the number of jobs in the Regional Growth Centre to 17,000 by 2040.

6.2: Vibrant Region (Chapter 4)

- **RPOs 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7.**
  
  In relation to RPOs 4.3, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7, how can the LECP support the following:
  
  i. Preparation and Implementation of Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEPDs) via Failte Ireland.
  
  ii. Progress improved Access to Coastal Routes / Walkways / Cycling Routes (WAW)
  
  iii. Expand service provision in Tourism Destination Towns, including public realm
  
- How can the LECP provide for employment opportunities for the increasing population at ratio of 0.66:1

6.3: Natural Region (Chapter 5)

- **RPOs 5.1, 5.8, 5.9, 5.18.**
  
  In terms of the above RPOs, how can the LECP deliver on the following:
  
  i. Implementation of measures within the Local Authority Climate Action Strategy.
  
  
  iii. Deliver Greenways

6.4: Connected Region (Chapter 6)

- **RPO 6.27: Local Transport Plans.**
  
  With respect to RPO 6.27, how can the LECP influence the implementation of Local Transport Plans in respect of relevant settlements in your Local Authority.

- **RPOs 6.41-6.60: Smart Region**
  
  In terms of the above RPOs, how can the LECP deliver a “Smart Region” approach in your Local Authority.

6.5: Inclusive Region (Chapter 7)

- **RPO 7.1**
  
  i. In relation to RPO 7.1, how can the LECP assist in the co-ordination of employment skills and support the alignment of needs as identified by the Regional Skills Fora to include facilities and opportunities for disadvantaged areas and groups in the community.

- **RPO 7.2**
  
  ii. In terms of RPO 7.2, how will the LECP support disadvantaged communities, facing particular barriers to employment, including actively marketing vacancies that are relevant to them.

- **RPO 7.3**
  
  iii. With respect to RPO 7.3, demonstrate how the LECP shall promote vocational and occupational programmes and pathways for progression to a career.

- **RPO 7.5**
  
  iv. Considering RPO 7.5, how can the LECP support the requirements of emerging sectors in terms of skills needs.

- **RPO 7.11**
  
  v. With respect to RPO 7.11, can the LECP support the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan and the National Obesity Plan

- **RPO 7.13**
  
  vi. In terms of RPO 7.13, are there any actions that can be taken to make this county an Age-Friendly one, recognising the demographic challenges that it faces.
Appendix A

1: Average mortgage repayment to net income ratio for first time buyers (FTB)

- This metric examines average FTB affordability by NUTS 2 Region, NUTS 3 Region and County, for 2020, with this ratio expressed as a percentage (i.e. average monthly mortgage repayment due on the average FTB priced property as a percentage of the average monthly disposable income of an FTB couple). This percentage should be compared relative to the standard affordability mark of 30% (i.e. housing costs should be below 30% of a household's disposable income).

- By utilising data from the CSO’s “County Income and Regional GDP” publication – which provides average disposable income per capita (excluding rent) by NUTS 2 Region, NUTS 3 Region and County – and the CSO’s “Regional Property Price Index” – which provides the average property price paid by FTBs by NUTS 2 Region, NUTS 3 Region and County – we can examine average FTB affordability in each of these geographical areas.

- The CSO’s “County Income and Regional GDP” publication, provides disposable income per capita (excluding rent) for each NUTS 2 Region, NUTS 3 Region and County between 2016 and 2020. However, such incomes would reflect net earnings of individuals across a variety of age cohorts and wouldn’t solely reflect the incomes of FTBs, which tend to be of a younger demographic. To combat this, disposable incomes levels are adjusted using privately requested data from the CSO’s “Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC)”, which contains information on both income and age, allowing this analysis to proxy FTB average disposable incomes using data on the income of individuals aged 40 or under. (See 2020 ratios in Table 3 at the end of Appendix). Such ratios are available for each year between 2016 and 2020.

- The income of individuals aged 40 or under were considered appropriate to represent FTB incomes as the average age of FTBs outside and inside Dublin were 34 and 35 years old respectively – according to research by the Central Bank of Ireland – while a similar approach would have been used by the ESRI. Having adjusted the CSO’s average disposable income per capita (excluding rent) data to reflect average income where the individual is aged 40 or less, such figures are then multiplied by two to replicate the joint income earned by a couple per year. This annual figure is then divided by 12 (i.e. 12 months) to obtain the average monthly disposable income of a couple, aged 40 and under; which is a proxy for FTBs.

- The Assembly proceeded to calculate what the average monthly repayment in each NUTS 2 Region, NUTS 3 Region and County for the average FTB priced property in each of these areas. It is important to note that the average property price for FTBs was based on the selection of the CSO tabs “All dwellings statues”, “first time buyer households”, “mean sales price”, “executions” in the CSO table of HPA03 tabs (https://data.cso.ie/table/HPA03).

- Considering FTB couples require a 10% deposit, these buyers would have a loan-to-value ratio of 90%.
as per the Central Bank’s Macroprudential mortgage rules. By applying the average interest rate as of December of 2020 from the Central Bank of Ireland\(^{50}\) and using a standard 30 year term mortgage – in line with the approach used by the ESRI\(^{51}\) – the Assembly calculated the average monthly mortgage repayment in each NUTS 2 Region, NUTS 3 Region and County using the PMT function in Microsoft Excel.

- By combining this information with average monthly disposable income levels (adjusted to reflect individuals under the age of 40) this allowed the Assembly to calculate the Average Mortgage Repayment to Net Income Ratio for First Time Buyers.

### 2: Average rent to net Income ratio of renters

- This metric examines how affordable the average monthly rent would be for a couple earning the average monthly disposable income of a renter by NUTS 2 Region, NUTS 3 Region and County, for 2020, with this ratio expressed as a percentage (i.e. average monthly rent as a percentage of the average monthly disposable income of renters). This percentage should be compared relative to the standard affordability mark of 30% (i.e. housing costs should be below 30% of disposable income)

- In this regard, the Assembly adjusted the average disposable income per capita (excluding rent) data provided from the CSO’s “County Income and Regional GDP” using information from the CSO’s “SILC” to reflect the average income of households that are renters. (See 2020 ratios in Table 4 at the end of Appendix A)

- This data is provided at a NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 Regional level. The corresponding ratios for counties are not available, therefore the appropriate NUTS 3 Regional ratio was applied to counties based within the sub-region in question.

- Having adjusted the average disposable income (excluding rent) data to reflect average income where the individuals are renting, such figures are then multiplied by two to reflect the standard household income earned by a couple that are renters.

- We then express the average monthly rental payment in each NUTS 2 Region, NUTS 3 Region and county\(^{52}\) as a proportion of the average disposable income of renters in these areas, allowing the Assembly to develop an average rent to net income ratio for couples renting in these areas. The average monthly rental payment in a geographical area is based on the average rent of a 2 bed, across all property types, as per the CSO’s RTB data.

- Average disposable income levels are based on the appropriate county data, adjusted using the appropriate ratio in Table 4 below.

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\(^{50}\) Table 2-b-1 “House Purchases, o/w new lending ex renegotiations”: https://www.centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/retail-interest-rates

\(^{51}\) https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RN20190402_0.pdf

\(^{52}\) Provided by the CSO: https://data.cso.ie/table/RIA02
### Table 3: Ratio of average income of individuals aged 40 or less vs average income of all household types, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-East</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-West</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-West</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWR</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRA</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMRA</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO SILC. Similar ratios are available for 2016-2019. E.g. the average income for individuals aged 40 or under in Dublin is around 98% of the average income of all individuals in Dublin.

### Table 4: Ratio of average income of renters vs average income of all household types, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border</td>
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<td>West</td>
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<td>Dublin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-East</td>
<td>0.68</td>
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<td>Mid-West</td>
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<td>South-East</td>
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<td>South-West</td>
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<tr>
<td>NWRA</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRA</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMRA</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO SILC. Similar ratios are available for 2016-2019. E.g. the average income for renters in Dublin is around 80% of the average income of all individuals in Dublin.