



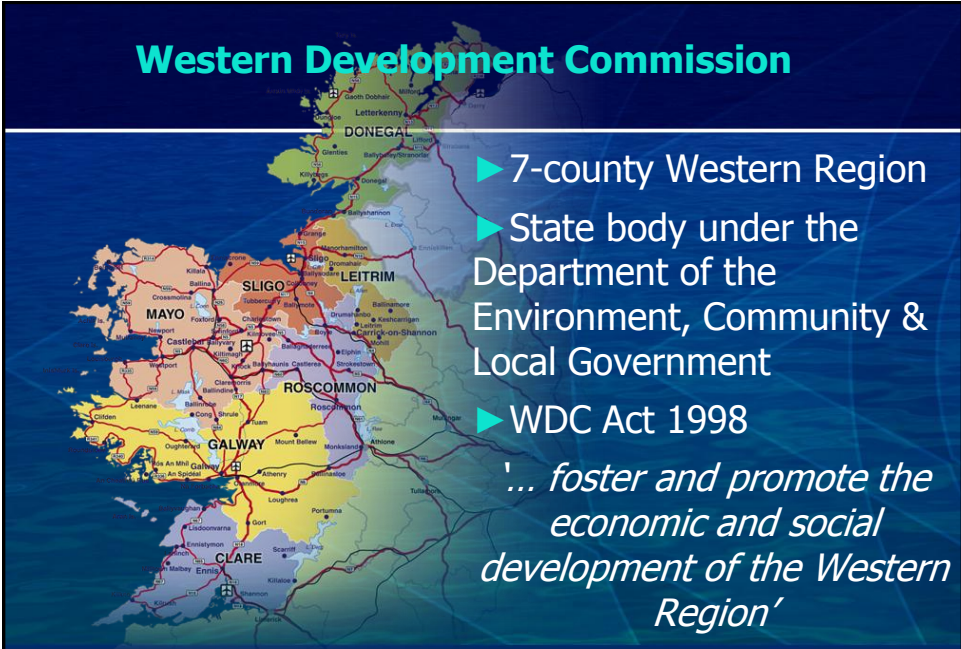
Critical Issues for Rural Areas

*Presentation to S&E
Regional & Rural Affairs Sub-
Committee
12 Oct 2012*

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Western Development Commission



- ▶ 7-county Western Region
- ▶ State body under the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government
- ▶ WDC Act 1998

'... foster and promote the economic and social development of the Western Region'

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What do we do?

1. Inform **policy**-making through data analysis (e.g. employment, infrastructure)
2. Support sustainable **development** based on region's resources (e.g. wood heat, creative)
3. Promote benefits of living, working & doing business in Western Region – **LookWest.ie**
4. Provide risk capital & micro-loans to SMEs & social enterprises through WDC Investment **Fund**

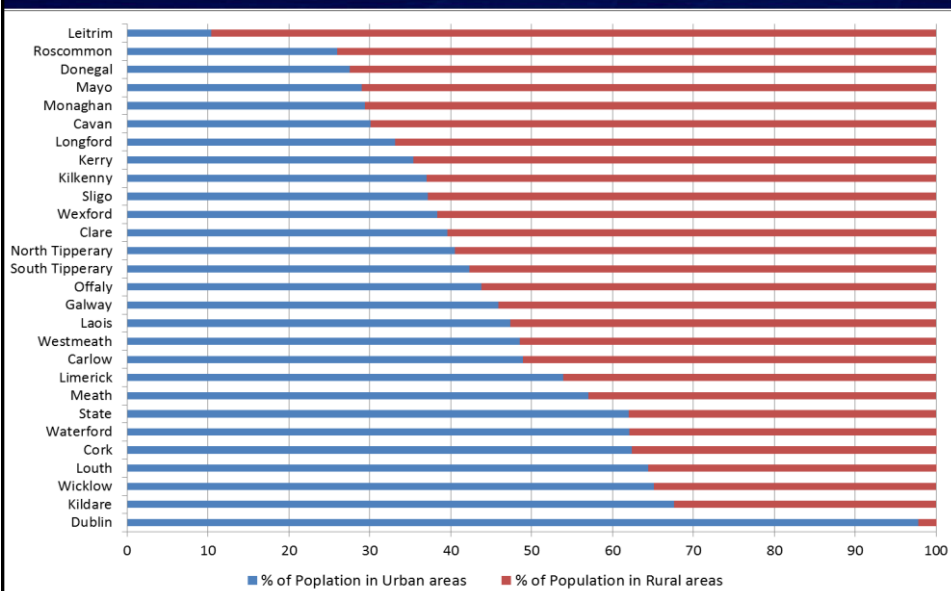


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What is Rural? Outside towns 1,500+ pop.



Rural Areas...

- ▶ Have assets which provide opportunities for growth & development ... not solely based on traditional uses of natural resources
- ▶ Can develop to their potential to benefit those living or wanting to live in rural areas
- ▶ Contribute substantially to the national economy
- ▶ Have advantages in sectors where quality of location is important e.g. creative industries, high-end knowledge workers with home office

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Critical Issues for Rural Areas

- ▶ Economic / Employment Structure
- ▶ Unemployment
- ▶ Age Profile
- ▶ Emigration and Population Decline
- ▶ Higher Education Levels
- ▶ Infrastructure / Access

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Employment Structure

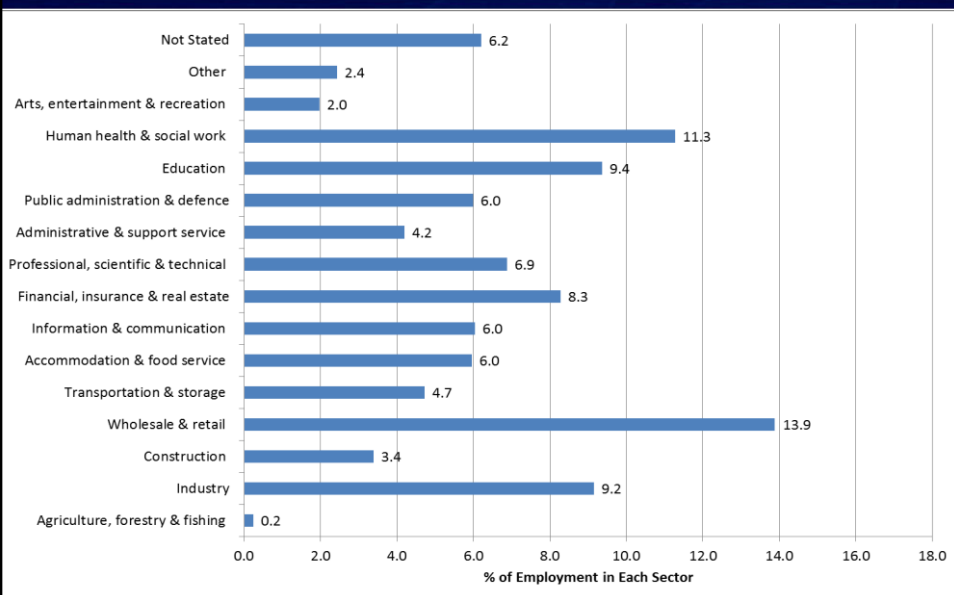
- ▶ 12.3% of rural residents work in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing
- ▶ Employment Structure differs between urban & rural
 - ▶ Wholesale & Retail biggest employment sector in most areas, biggest in smaller towns & villages
 - ▶ Manufacturing more important in smaller towns & villages
 - ▶ Agriculture & Construction increase in importance in smaller/more rural areas
 - ▶ Knowledge intensive services very focused in cities, declines in more rural areas
 - ▶ Public sector very important source of employment across all areas

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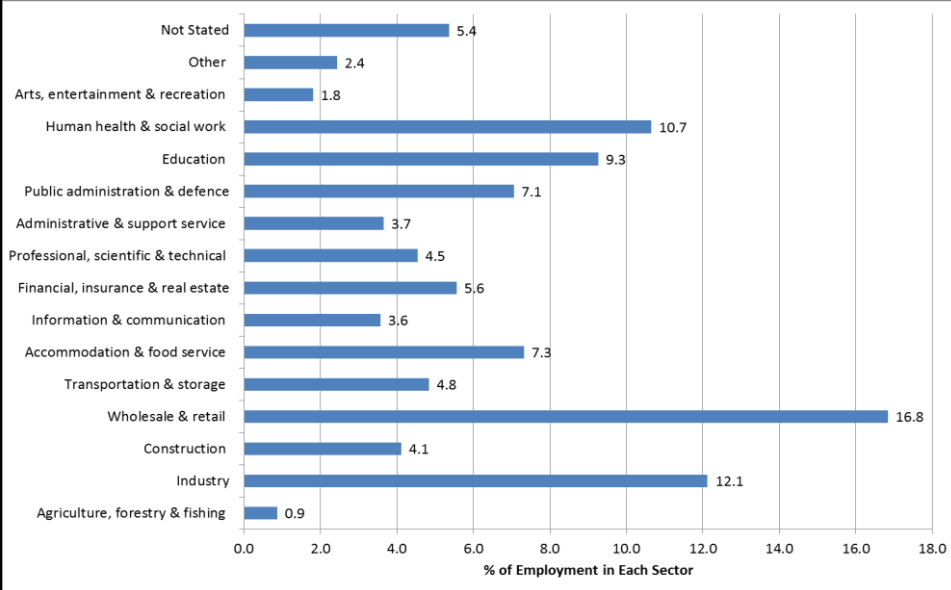
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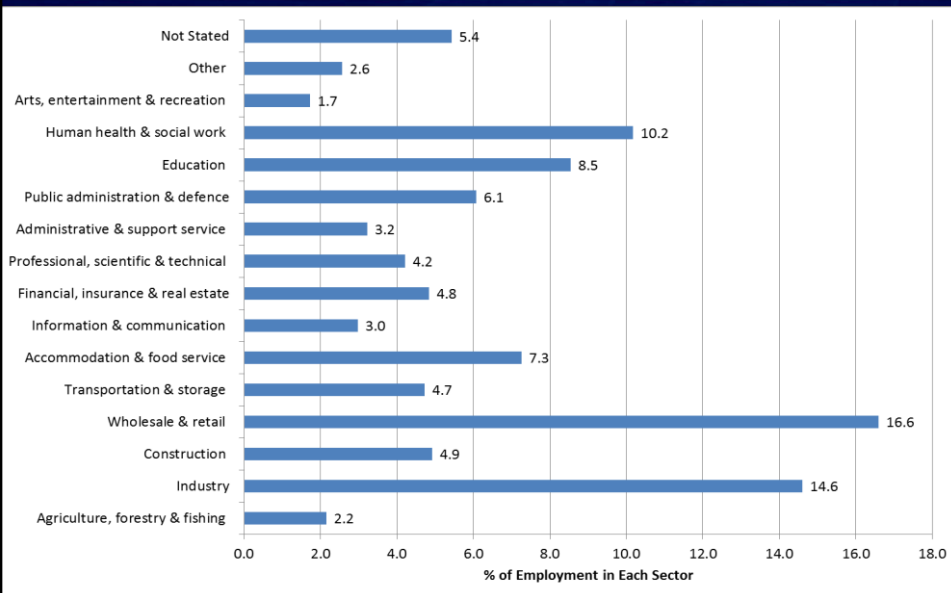
% Employed in each Sector 2011: Cities



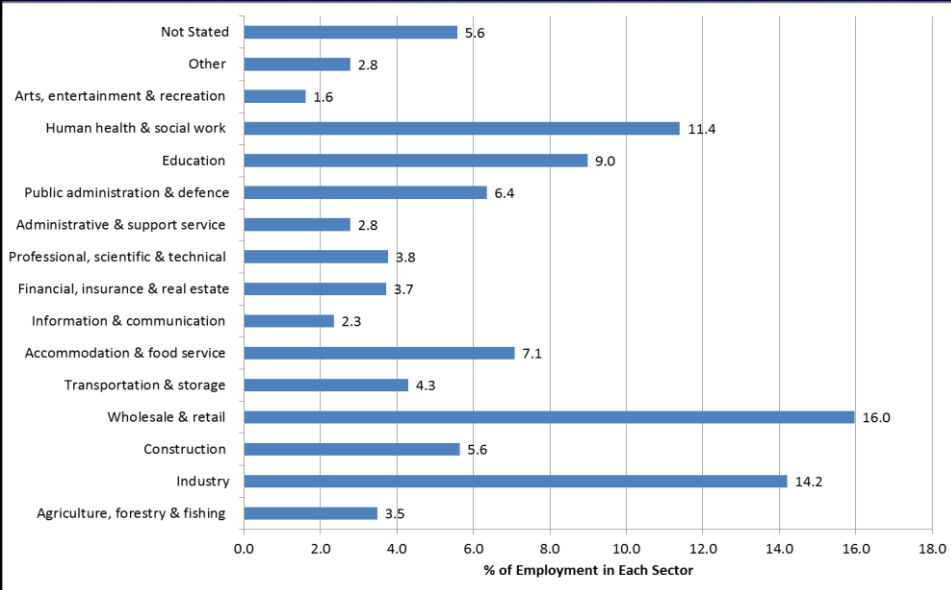
% Employed in each Sector 2011: Large Towns (10,000+ pop.)



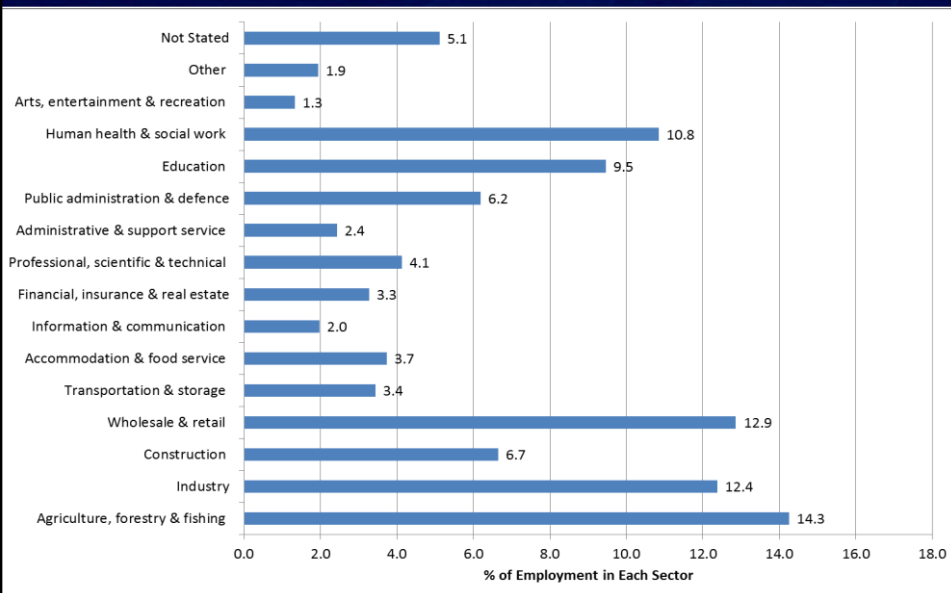
% Employed in each Sector 2011: Small & Medium Towns (1,500-9,999 pop.)



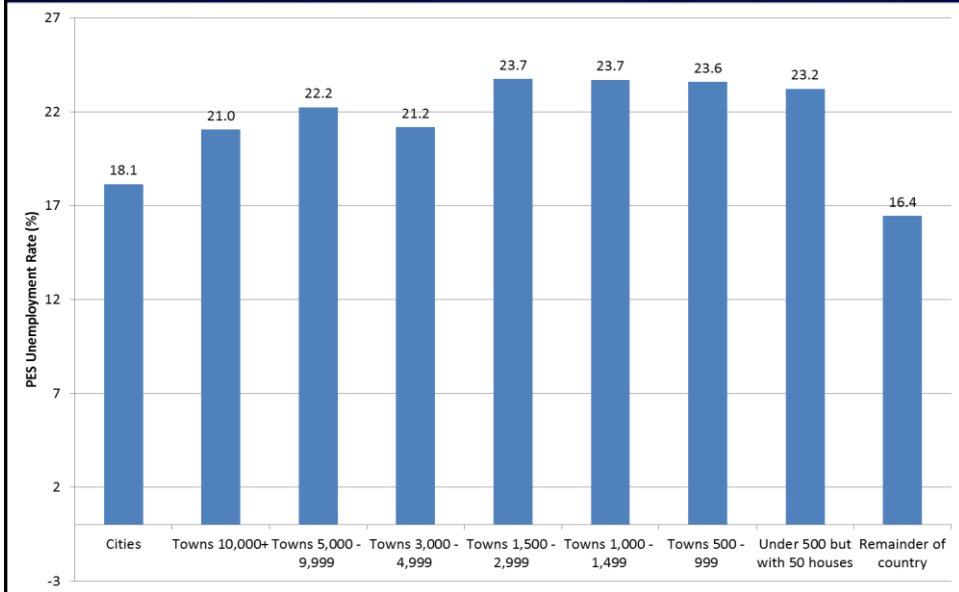
% Employed in each Sector 2011: Villages (from 50 houses to 1,500 pop.)



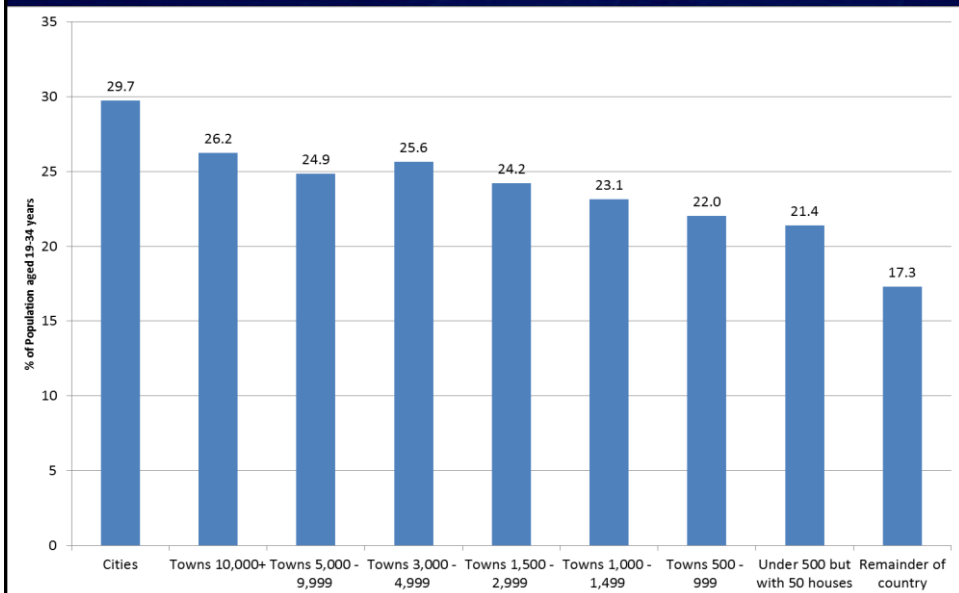
% Employed in each Sector 2011: Countryside



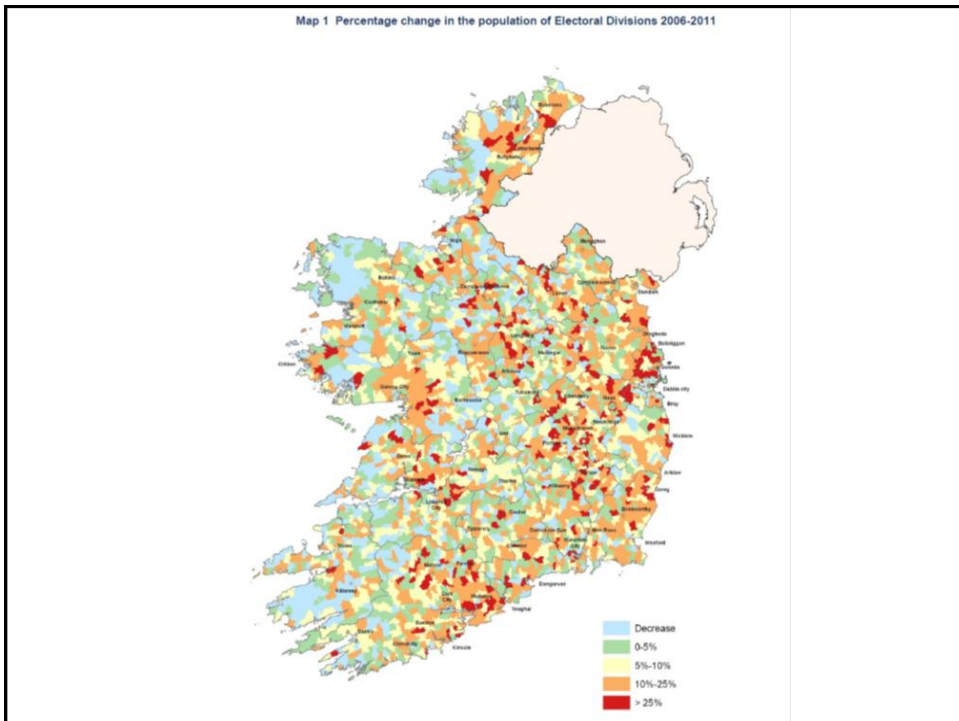
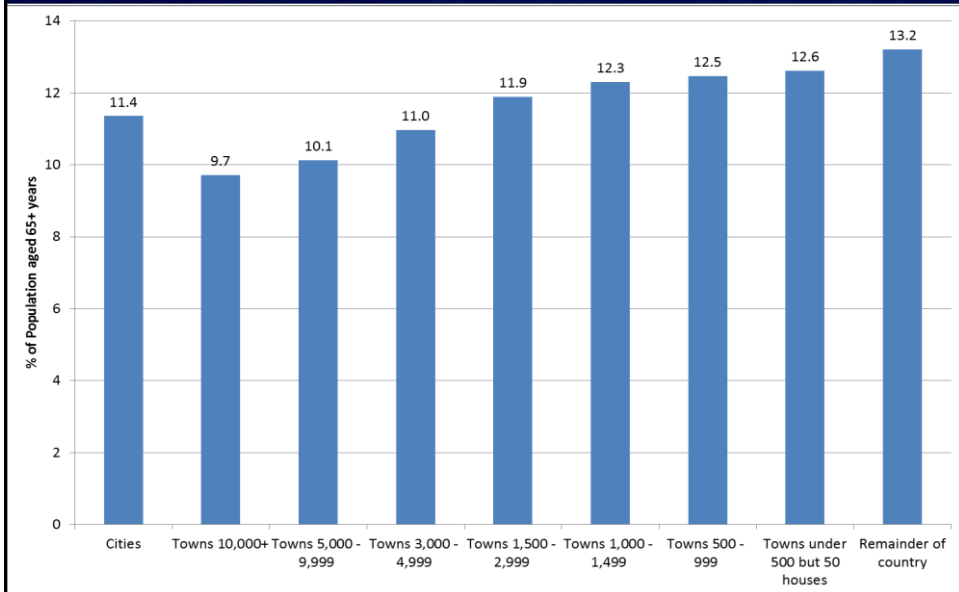
Rural Towns & Villages have higher Unemployment Rates



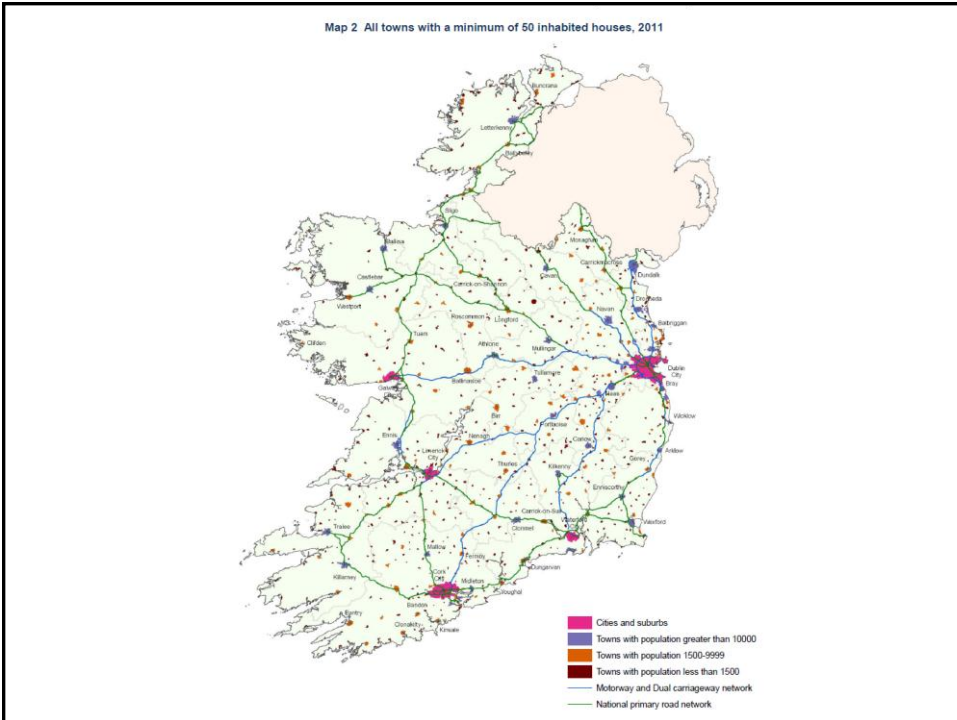
Rural areas have smaller shares of people aged 19-34 years



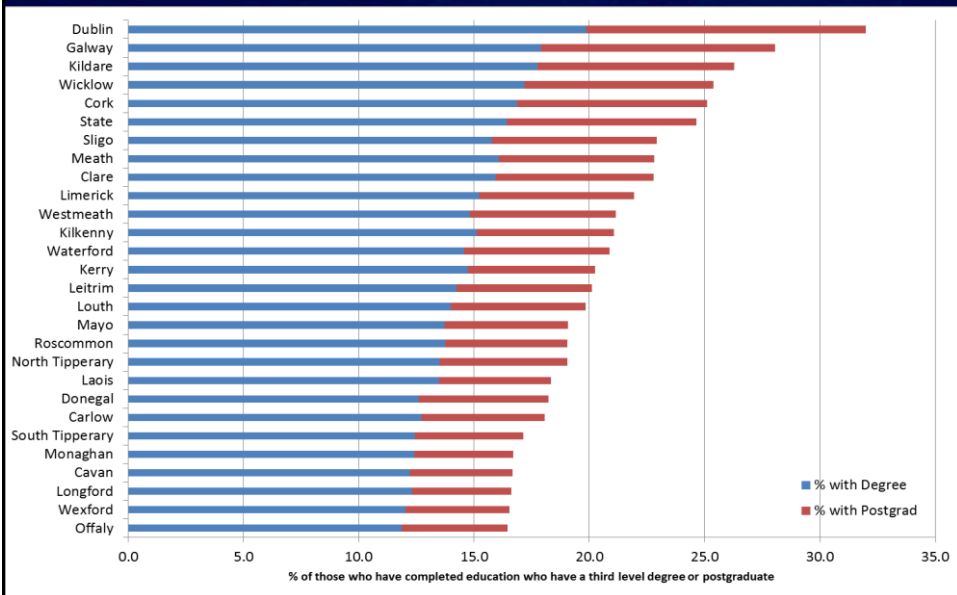
Rural areas have higher shares of people aged 65+



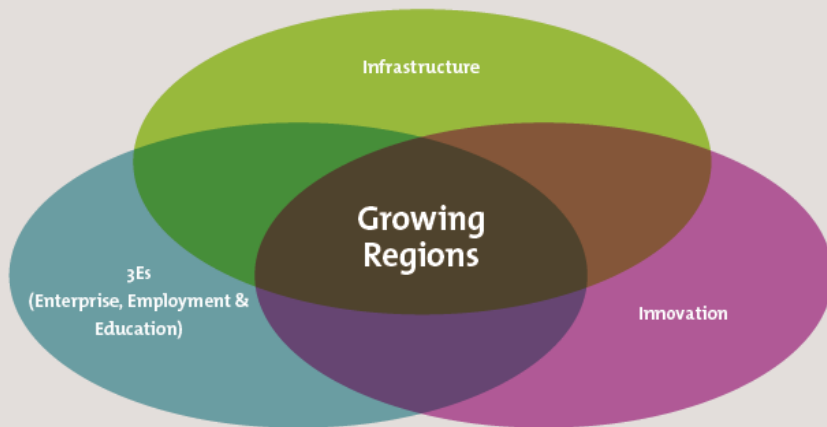
Map 2 All towns with a minimum of 50 inhabited houses, 2011



Rural Counties have fewer with 3rd Level: % of population with a Degree or Postgrad



How can Rural Issues be Addressed?



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Infrastructure

- ▶ Improving infrastructure will increase productivity of rural businesses & increase attractiveness for investment & tourism
- ▶ Next Generation Broadband is key infrastructure. Rural areas need the same speeds & bandwidth as urban areas
 - ▶ Home working (tele-working, home business)
 - ▶ Knowledge intensive businesses
 - ▶ Online sales for all businesses
 - ▶ Video-conferencing
- ▶ Other infrastructure – transport, energy, community

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Innovation

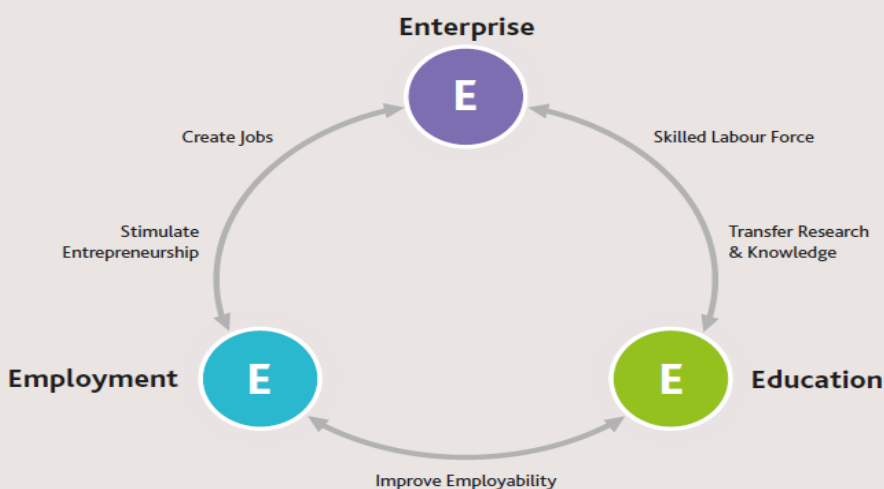
- ▶ Innovation often associated with scientific & technological research, but not relevant for most rural areas
- ▶ Need to support adoption of innovations from elsewhere e.g. TechSearch, Innovation Vouchers
- ▶ Increased collaboration between Higher Education & rural enterprises – focus by HEIs on assets of their region
- ▶ Non-technological innovation (organisation, management, process) critical for rural enterprises e.g. use of social media to market, joint branding
- ▶ Soft supports to enhance innovative thinking in rural SMEs and micro-enterprises – isolation

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3Es Education, Enterprise & Employment



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Education

- ▶ Raise educational/qualification level of lower skilled jobseekers & workers in rural areas
- ▶ Provide 'right skills' for jobs likely to emerge in future
- ▶ Specific programmes to reskill rural young men with low skills outside of construction, including community based 'learning mentors'
- ▶ Need to address barriers to adult upskilling in rural areas
 - ▶ Transport (rural transport)
 - ▶ Broadband access (central provision, libraries)
 - ▶ Caring responsibilities
- ▶ Entrepreneurship & business skill education

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Enterprise

- ▶ Need to diversify the enterprise base of rural areas & develop enterprises built around rural assets inc. skilled people
- ▶ Sole traders, micro-enterprises & SMEs are central
- ▶ Social enterprise – suited to rural areas with strong communities e.g. Dunhill Rural Enterprises
- ▶ Small rural start-up enterprises need support for
 - ▶ shared services (e.g. meeting rooms, book keeping)
 - ▶ networking
 - ▶ mentoring
 - ▶ space with infrastructure e.g. high speed broadband

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Employment

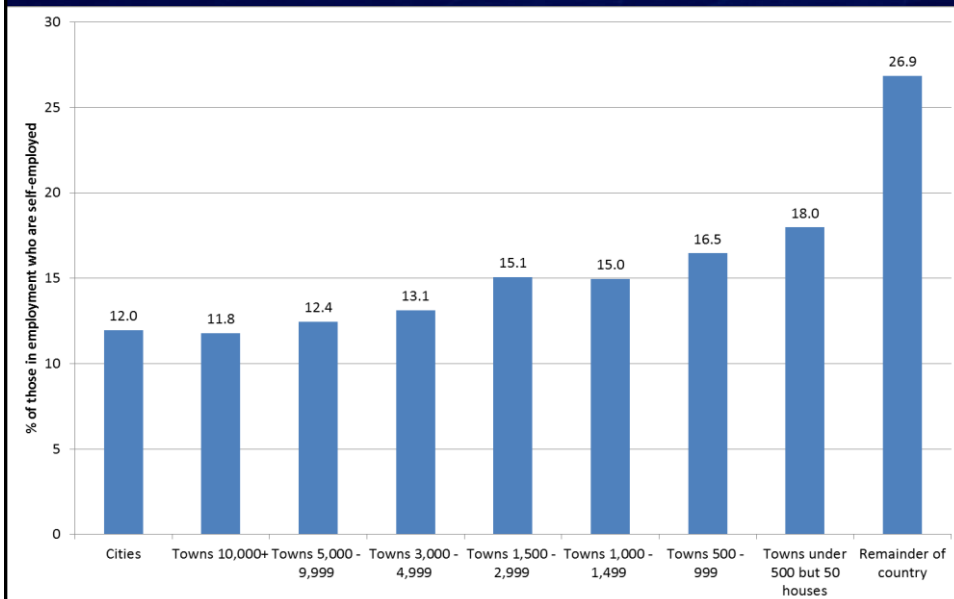
- ▶ Growing exporting sectors critical BUT can't fully solve unemployment challenge of rural areas
- ▶ Locally trading employment-intensive sectors e.g. caring, retail
- ▶ Higher levels of self-employment in rural areas
- ▶ 'Necessity' for some – want to live in a rural area but limited jobs in their sector e.g. software designer, how can they be supported to create their own job?
- ▶ To create jobs enterprises need improved access to finance, export markets & the right mix of skills

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Higher % Self-employed in Rural Areas



Some Rural Growth Sectors

- ▶ Green economy
- ▶ Agri-Food
- ▶ Tourism
- ▶ Knowledge services
- ▶ Creative sector
- ▶ Caring sector
- ▶ Home based micro-enterprises

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Current developments

- ▶ Microfinance Ireland
<http://www.microfinanceireland.ie/>
- ▶ Rural Commission
- ▶ Local Government Sectoral Strategy
- ▶ Rural Development Programme 2014-2020
- ▶ CEBs – LEOs
- ▶ Solas (FÁS & VECs)
- ▶ National Broadband Plan

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Thank You

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