

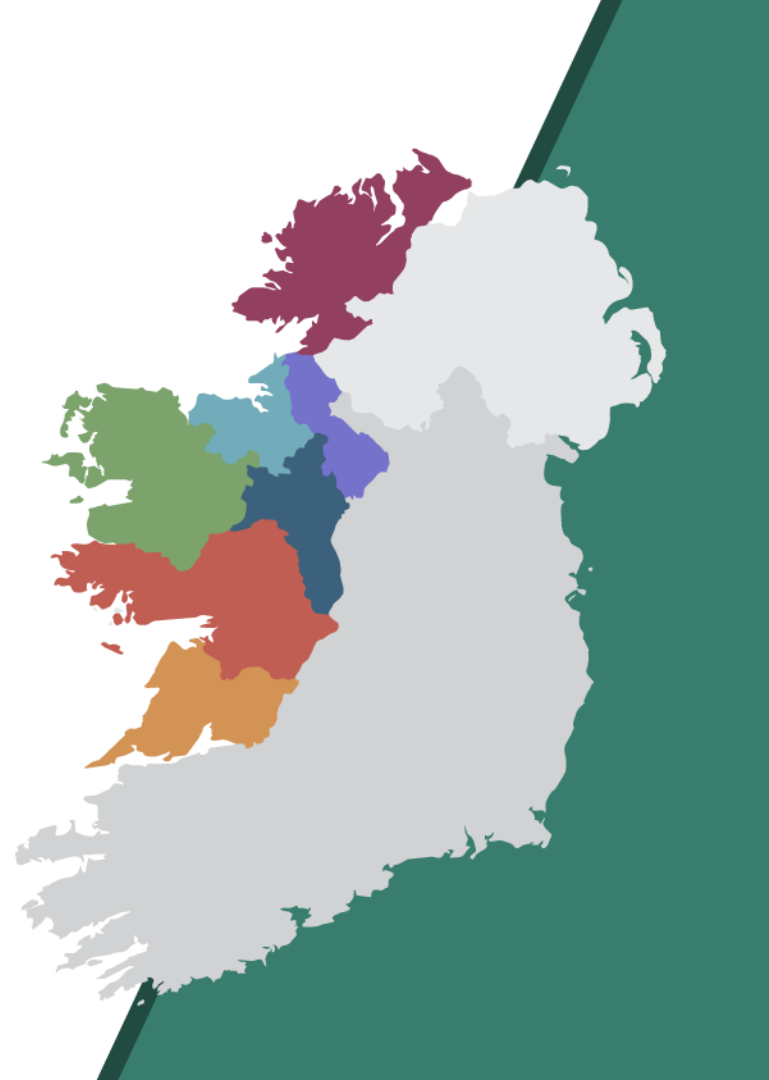
Regional Growth: Rural areas, towns & cities

RSA Irish Branch Annual Conference

Deirdre Frost, Policy Analyst; **Helen McHenry**, Policy Analyst; **Pauline White**, Policy Analyst

Western Development Commission

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- The Western Region
- Regional Growth – NPF
- Cities, Towns & Rural Areas
- Levers of Regional Development
- NPF implementation

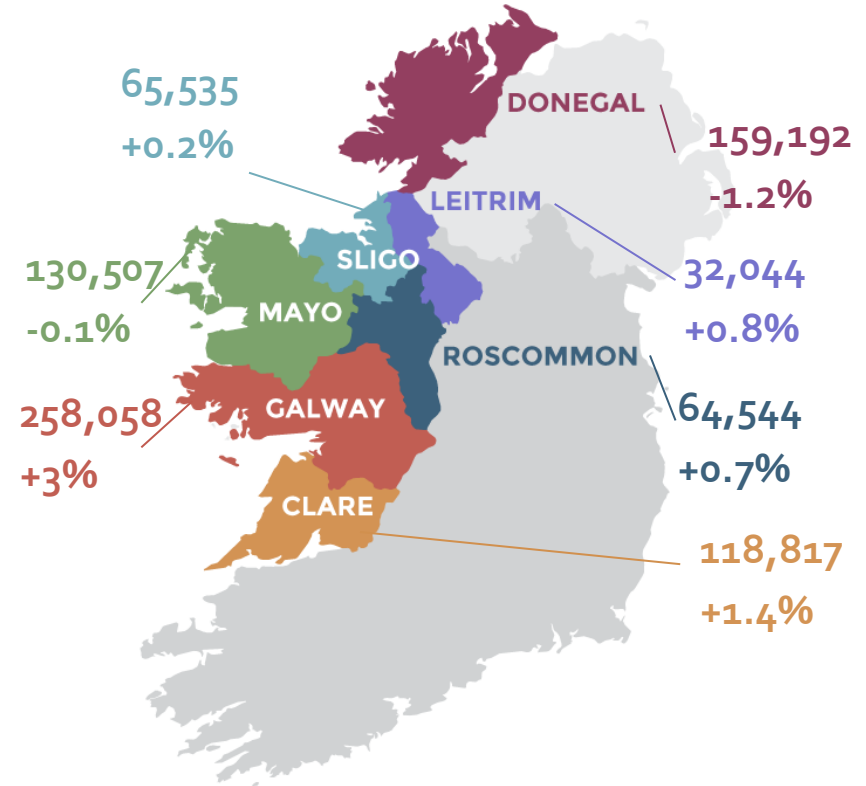
- 7 county Western Region
- State body – Department of Rural & Community Development
- WDC Act 1998

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



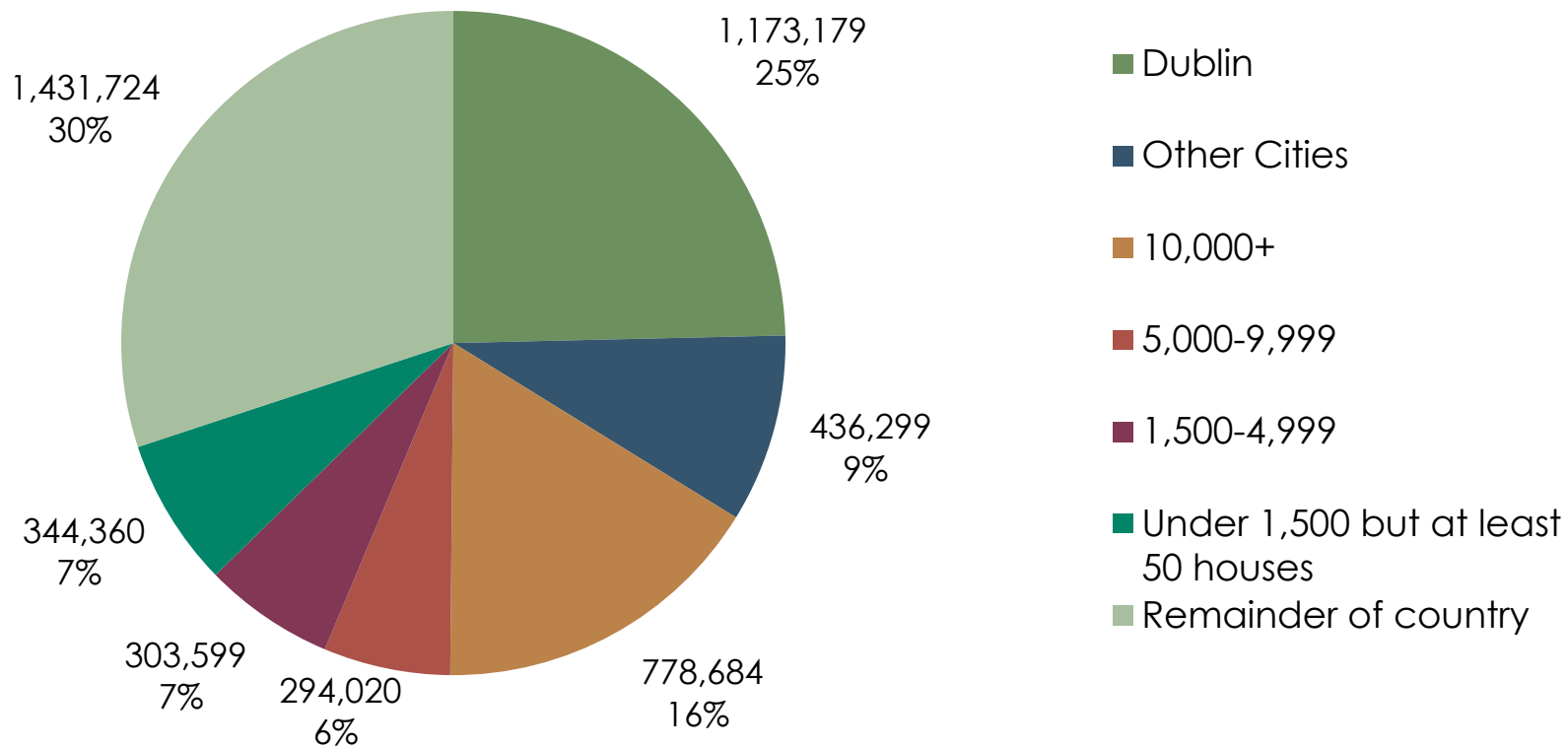
The Western Region

- 828,697 people (2016)
- Share of national population
 - 1841: 30.7%
 - 2016: 17.4%
- Population change
 - 0.95% in WR v 3.8% in State (2011-2016)
 - Home to only 2 counties in Ireland with pop decline
- **64.7% live in rural areas v 37% in State**
- Urban centres: 1 city; 5 towns 10,000+; 34 towns 1,500-9,999



- All areas of Ireland – Capital, 2nd tier cities, large, medium & small-sized towns, villages & open countryside – have role to play in national economy & as locations to live
- **Many aspects of life change very slowly** – demographics, settlement patterns. Need to plan *given current & historical patterns*
- Job opportunities critical in decision of where to live, but not the only factor
- NPF needs to recognise complexity of social & personal reasons for people's location decisions

National Population by Urban Size (2016)

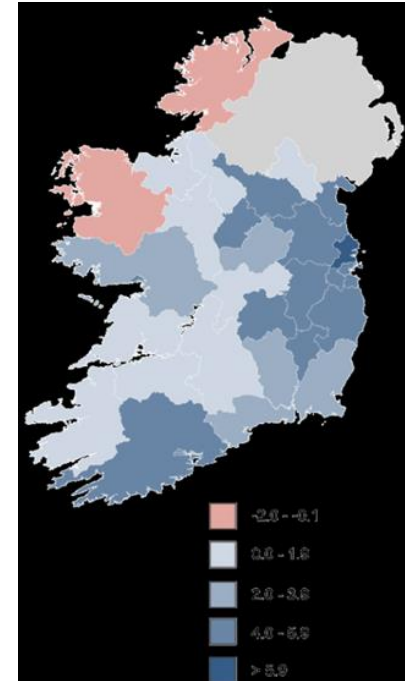


- To effectively support national growth there can't be excessive urban concentration – housing, congestion ...
- Primacy of Ireland's capital unusual compared to other advanced small countries
- **One goal of NPF should be promote 2nd tier cities**
 - Galway the only built-up area which experienced consistent population growth greater than national avg. 1996-2016 (41% v 31%)
 - Why? Quality of life appeal, good employment opportunities, tech. & medical devices, strong educational & health facilities ... Absence of a larger growth centre to the North, drew from large catchment
- Can't assume that development of key cities will constitute regional development

What about the North West?

- Donegal & Mayo: only counties with population decline 2011-2016
- Sligo & Mayo: lowest growth in employment in State 2011-2016
- Roscommon & Mayo: highest decline in enterprise numbers 2011-2015
- Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal & Mayo: highest commercial vacancy rates
- Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon & Donegal: highest shares working in Public Services
- **North West needs a stronger urban centre**
 - Sligo best located to serve wider region
 - With effective linkages to other urban centres throughout region, Sligo can become a more effective regional driver
 - Real commitment & co-ordination across all public & private stakeholders
 - Letterkenny has particular role in terms of cross-border growth

Motorway network, Natural Gas Transmission & Population change 2011-2016



What role for towns?

- Towns often play similar role to that of cities & equally important to their regions – **A matter of scale**
- Emphasis in NPF on cities & their role, BUT for large share of Ireland's population, towns are key service centre education, retail, recreation & primary health
- Even within city hinterlands, people access many daily services in smaller centres
- NPF needs to be clear on the role it sees for towns in effective regional development, detailed in RSEs

What role for towns?

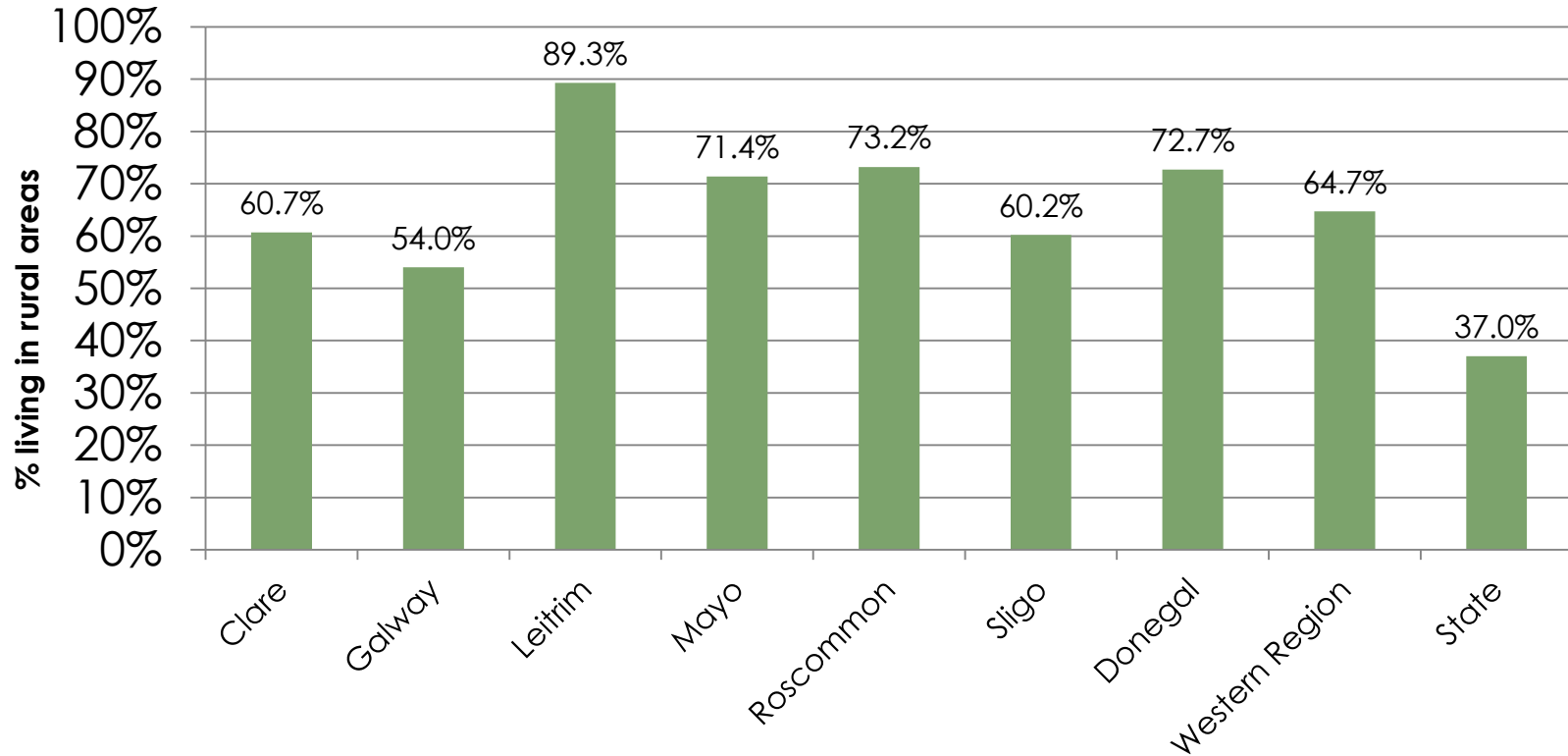
- Context of each town differs e.g. distance from other towns & cities, size of hinterland, population, local governance. Infrastructure & service needs differ.
- **Traditional role of many towns & villages being challenged** e.g. retail, public services, agriculture, transport links
- Many towns & villages suffered lack of infrastructure investment which connects them locally, nationally & internationally
 - Local & regional roads
 - Broadband
 - Public transport

- **Need realistic assessment of assets of individual towns,** their role in urban hierarchy 'now' not 'then', why people come in to the town ...
- Sense of place, strong community attachment at town/village level
- Infrastructure investment could improve their capacity to provide services, maintain & attract enterprise & support their rural hinterlands
- Jobs ...

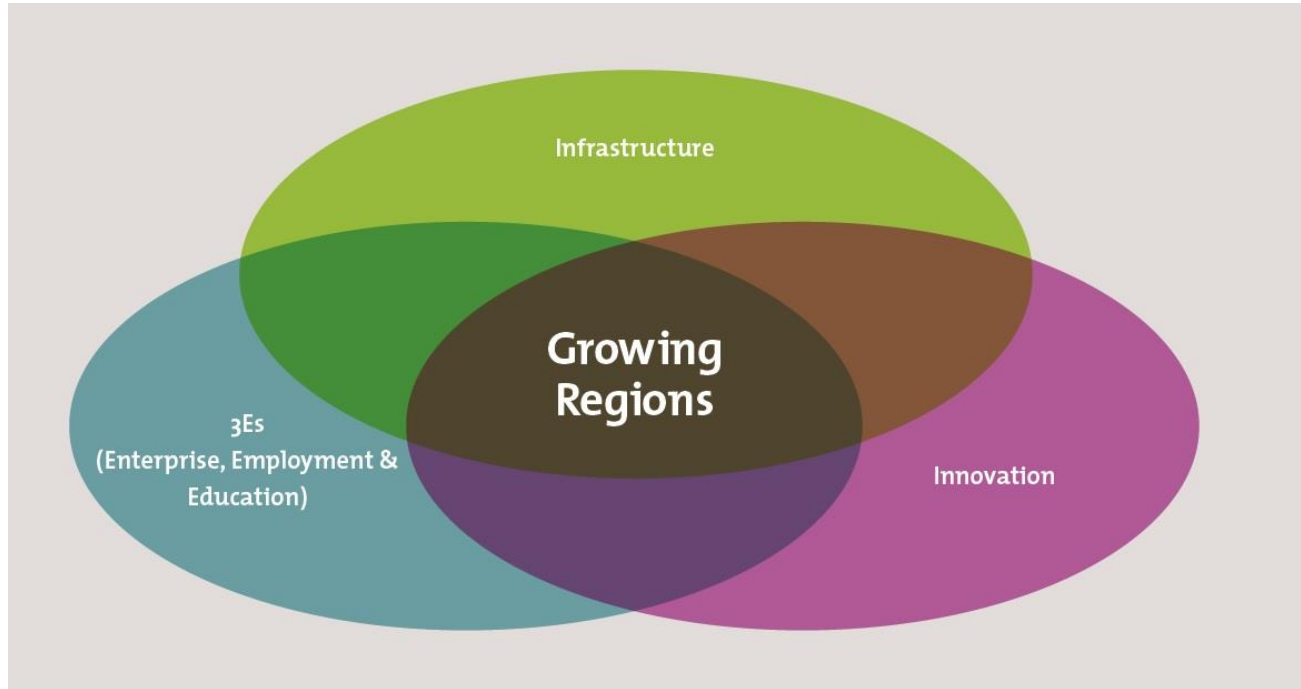
... and rural areas?

- Location of natural resources & most environmental, biodiversity & landscape assets. Places of residence & employment, as well as amenity, recreation & refuge
- But all rural areas & rural communities not the same:
 - remoteness & accessibility
 - demography – age profile
 - natural resource assets
 - economic/employment structure
 - access to infrastructure & technology
 - influence of neighbouring urban centres

% living in rural areas in western counties (2016)



Levers of Regional Development

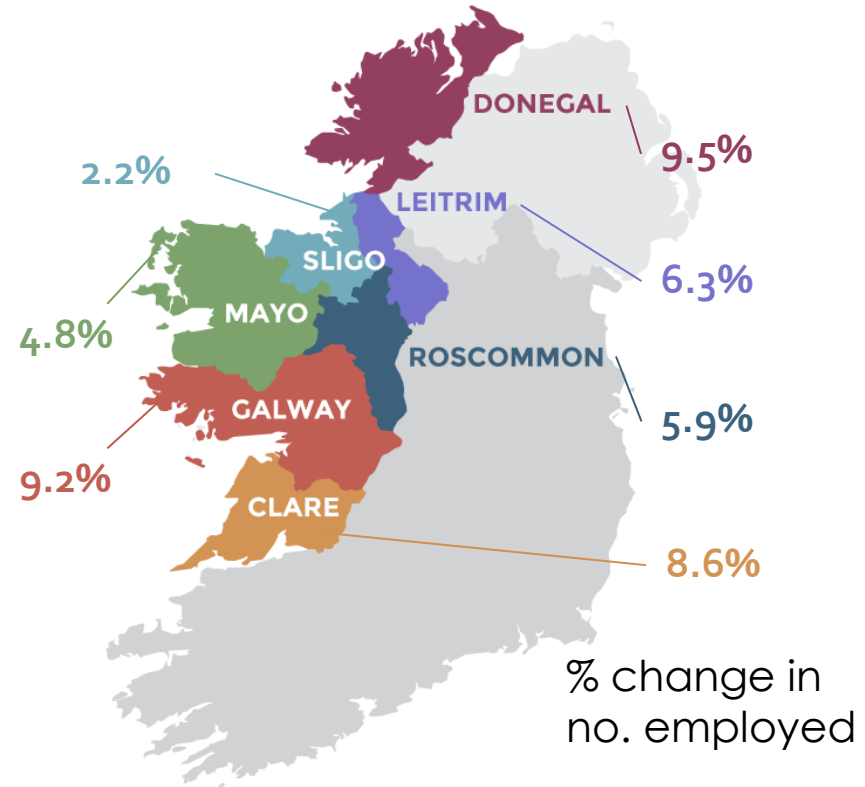


Enterprise, Employment & Education

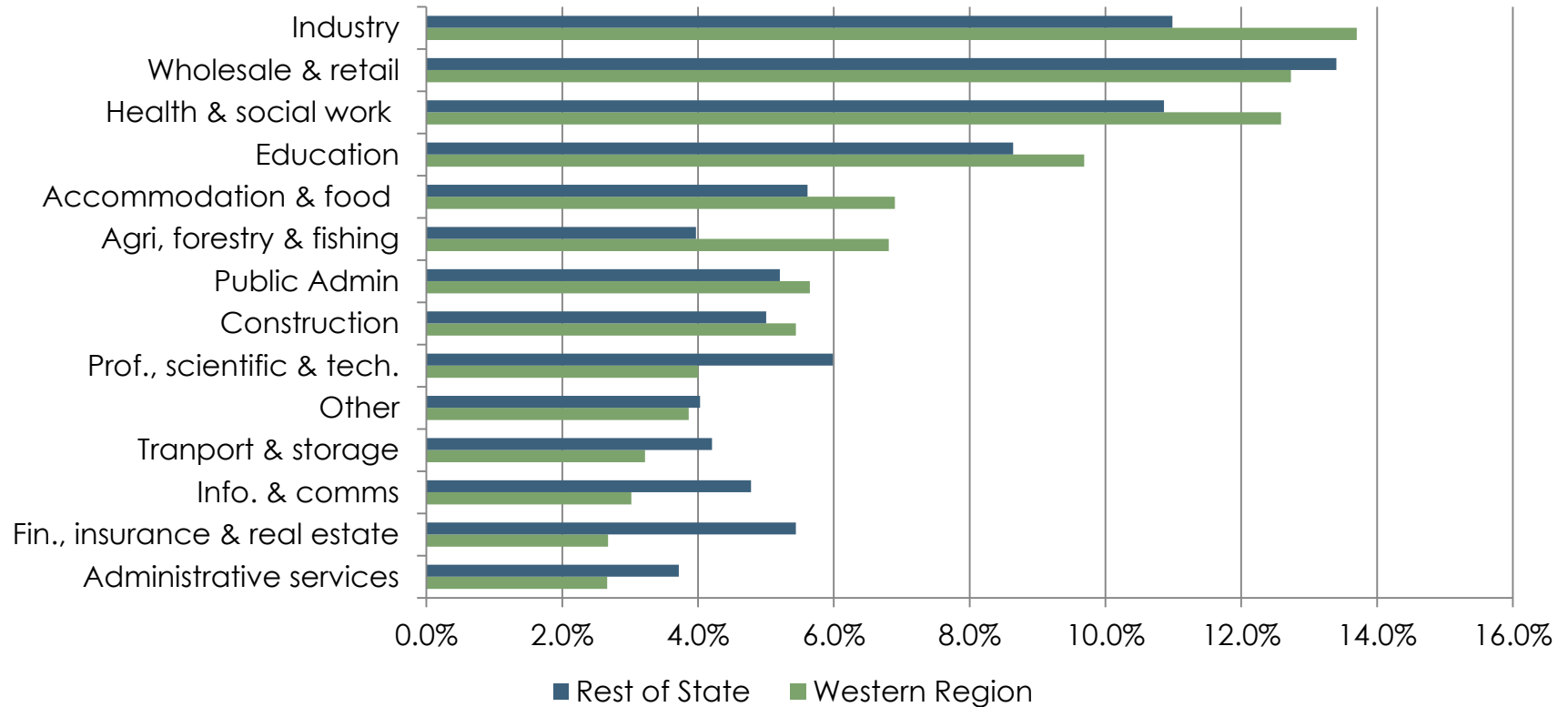
- **Availability of jobs key to maintaining vibrant populations in towns, villages & rural areas**
- Limited concept of 'job'/'work' in NPF. Self-employment, 'gig' economy, e-Working redefining concepts of work, enterprise & their location
- More effective intra-regional transport links extend labour catchments & open new opportunities
- Support diversification of enterprise base particularly in sectors where regions have comparative advantage e.g. medical devices, tourism, marine
- Focus on training in sectors & skill areas with growth opportunities for rural areas & towns with rural hinterlands

The Western Region – Enterprise & Employment

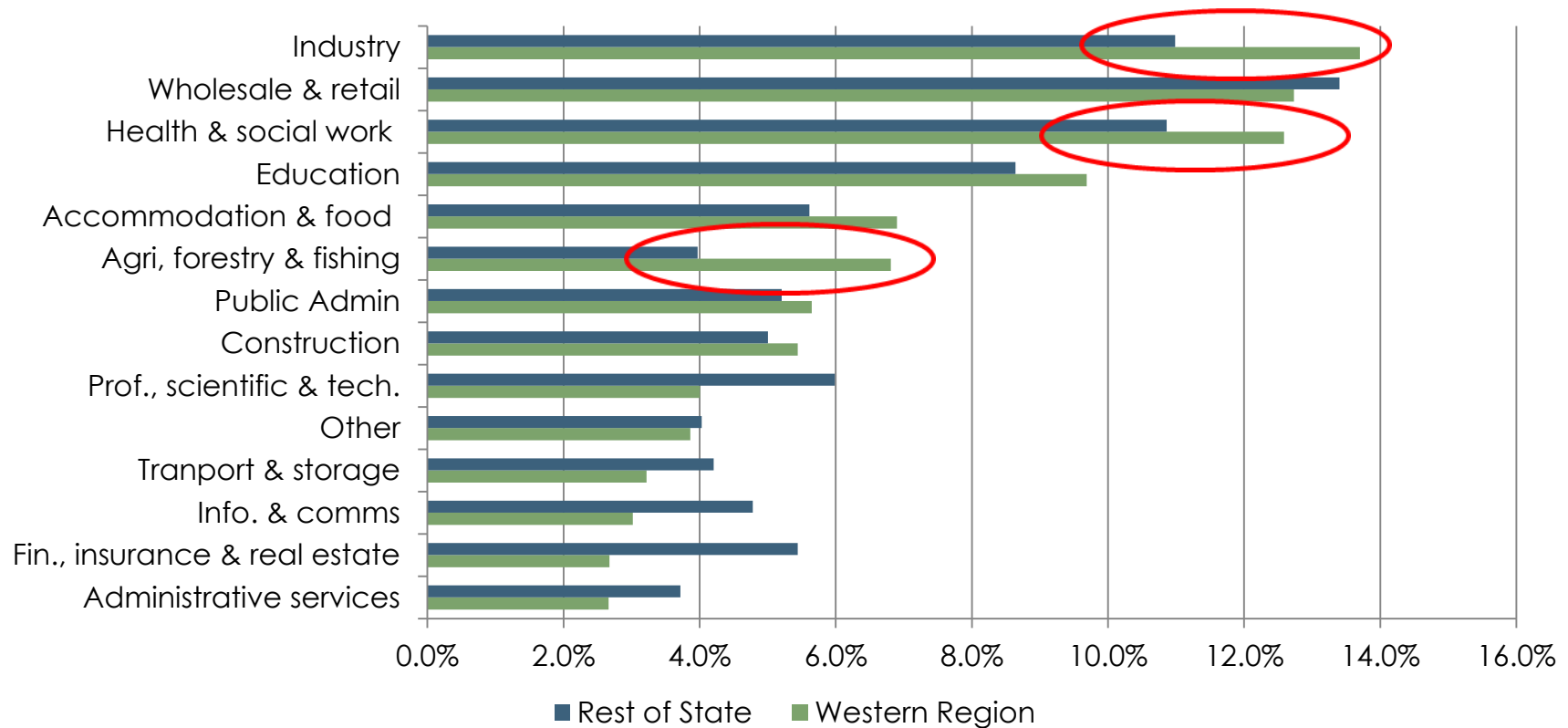
- Active Enterprises
 - -0.8% in WR v 3.3% in State (2011-2015)
 - Clare only WR county with increase
- No. in employment
 - Growth of 7.5% in WR v 11% in State (2011-2016)
 - 5 of 6 lowest growing counties in State
- Employment Sectors
 - More reliant on traditional sectors, public & local services
 - Industry performing very strongly
 - Small but growing knowledge services



% of employment by sector in Western Region and Rest of State (2016)



% of employment by sector in Western Region and Rest of State (2016)



% of employment by sector in Western Region and Rest of State (2016)



- New infrastructure can be transformative, so where do we place new investments?
- **Capital appraisal & evaluation methods need to be re-examined if we want to move from 'business as usual'**
- Investment in infrastructure can strongly influence location of other infrastructure e.g. motorway & rail
- Intra-regional linkages, local & regional roads needed to develop cities, towns & rural areas

Implementation of NPF

- A single body with responsibility & designated budget
- Sectoral policy is real driver of what happens in regions
- **Essential that all spending, investment & policy decisions are in line with NPF, rather than operating counter to it**
- Clear relationship between delivery of the NPF & the RSES in each of the three regions

Final Thoughts

- Can't assume that development of key cities will constitute regional development
- Objective is to improve economic & social opportunities for people who live in regions
- Change is slow – current settlement pattern will largely persist
- Towns act as key regional centres – what is their future role?
- Rural areas differ in opportunities & challenges but jobs only solution for viable rural areas & communities

Thank You

Q&A

All publications at www.wdc.ie/publications/

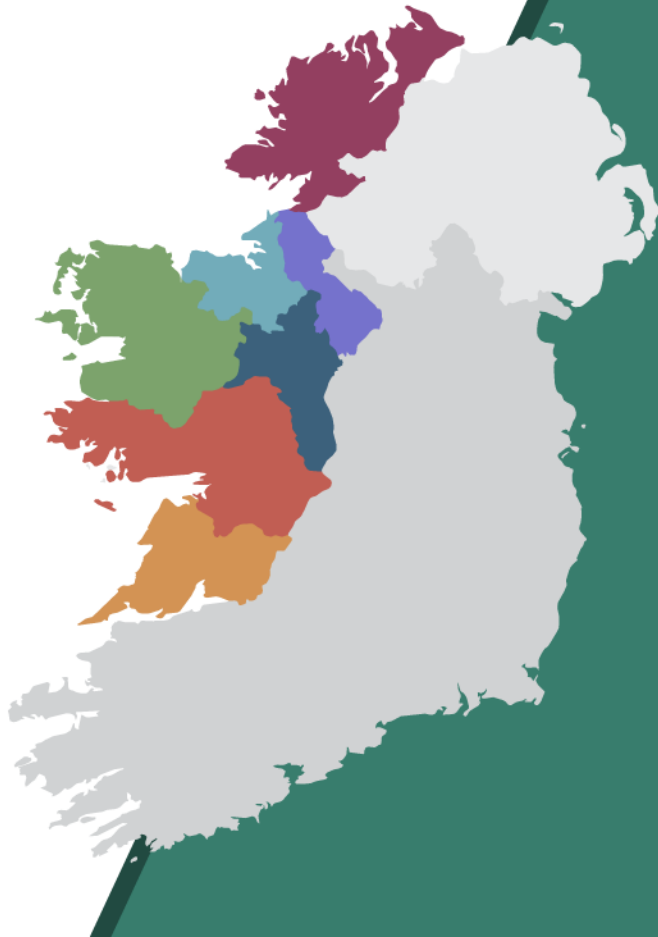
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Employer/Own account as % of Employed (2016)

