



Where will Future Population Growth Occur? Regional Population Projections

Population increase across all regions

The CSO recently issued *Regional Population Projections* for the period 2016–2031¹. Population growth and where it is likely to occur is important in planning for both public and private investment across a range of sectors from housing and enterprise to the provision of services such as education, health, transport and broadband.

The population of Ireland in 2011 was 4.5 million and it is projected to rise to 5.1 million in 2031, an increase of 613,000 people. It is projected that all regions will record a net increase in population. The most significant increase is predicted to occur in Dublin and the Mid-East – the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) – which is projected to grow by 401,400, accounting for 65% of total population growth.

Population to become more concentrated

Differing projected growth rates across regions mean that the population distribution across the country will change compared to that in 2011. The GDA accounted for 39.2% of the population in 2011 and by 2031 it is projected to account for 42.3% of the total population, see Table 1 below.

Table 1. Population Share 2011 and Projected Population Share 2031 by Region

Regional Authority area	Population Share 2011	Projected Population Share 2031	Change in Population Share 2011-2031
	%	%	%
Border	11.3	10.3	-1.0
GDA	39.2	42.3	3.1
Dublin	27.6	29.3	1.7
Mid-East	11.7	13.1	1.4
Midland	6.2	6.0	-0.2
Mid-West	8.3	7.9	-0.4
South-East	10.9	10.6	-0.3
South-West	14.5	14.1	-0.4
West	9.6	8.8	-0.8

1. These population projections are contained in the CSO *Regional Population Projections* release available at <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/rpp/regional-populationprojections2016-2031/#.U9DQF8tOWP8>. The CSO compiles six different sets of projections, but focus on one, the M2F2 Traditional scenario, which is the source of all data and analysis in this paper.



All regions, apart from Dublin and the Mid-East, will lose population share under these projections. The Border region share is set to decline by the most, its national share of population declining by 1 percentage point over the period to reach 10.3% of the national total in 2031. The West region has the next largest decline from a 9.6% share in 2011 to a projected 8.8% share in 2031.

West and Border with lowest projected population growth

The West and Border regions have the lowest projected population growth rates, each with an annual average projected growth rate of 0.2%. The Mid-West and Midland regions are next lowest, both with projected annual average growth rates of 0.4%. The South-East and South-West regions are projected to grow annually by an average of 0.5%, while Dublin and the Mid-East will have the highest rates of population growth of 0.9% and 1.2% respectively.

Most regions to experience negative migration

Though all regions will experience net population growth, this is largely as a result of natural increase (births greater than deaths). All regions apart from Dublin and the Mid-East will have negative internal migration (more outward flows from the region than inward flows from other regions). The Border, Mid-West and West regions are the only regions projected to have both negative internal and external migration (emigration). Dublin is the only region projected to increase its population through both positive internal and external migration and through natural increase.

Working age population projected to decline in West and Border

By 2031 the population of working age is expected to increase to 3.3 million nationally up from 3.0 million in 2011. However, not all regions are projected to experience an increase. The West and Border regions are the only regions with a projected decline in the population of working age.

Implications

In the absence of policy change, Ireland's population distribution is projected to become more concentrated in certain regions with particularly strong growth set to occur in Dublin and the Mid-East. This has serious implications for how the country plans for the future, in terms of where economic activity is located and where service provision and investment occurs. The distribution of the population of working age is also projected to become more regionally concentrated, with the West and Border the only regions with a decline in population of working age. This has significant implications for economic growth and development of all regions.

The projected trends are not inevitable and policy direction and effective implementation can alter growth patterns. In particular, policy related to employment and enterprise growth can strongly influence the location of population. The planned new National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies will be important in developing effective implementation policies to influence where future population growth occurs. The WDC will contribute to this process and will highlight the importance of a more balanced population distribution and the need for a strong economically active population supporting the growth of the Western Region.

A detailed WDC analysis of CSO *Regional Population Projections 2016-2031* for the Western Region can be downloaded from <http://www.wdc.ie/publications/reports-and-papers/>