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Commuting to Work:
Rural Dwellers, Urban Jobs

WDC Policy Briefings: The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body promoting economic and social development in the Western Region of Ireland (counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare). WDC Policy Briefings highlight and provide discussion and analysis of key regional policy issues.

Introduction

This Policy Briefing seeks to show the extent of rural commuting to urban centres for work and identifies some of the key labour market characteristics of those commuting. It highlights the importance of the rural labour supply to towns and gateways and considers some policy implications such as the importance of commuting in sustaining rural incomes.

As part of its work for the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA), the Western Development Commission (WDC) undertook research into national commuting patterns[1] and these data, rather than commuting specifically within the Western Region[2] is the focus of this Policy Briefing.

Commuting and employment

Commuting is integral to the operation of labour markets throughout the developed world. Across OECD countries there is net out commuting from rural regions indicating that there are more workers than jobs in rural regions. Analysing the nature and extent of commuting from rural to urban is therefore essential in understanding the rural economy and the importance of urban employment as an integral aspect in sustaining rural communities. The focus of this Policy Briefing is on those rural dwellers who commute to work in towns and in the nine National Spatial Strategy (NSS) gateways, based on data from the most recent Census of Population (2011). Commuting is defined as travel to work, by any transport mode including by foot.

Though commuting is often seen as predominantly from rural to urban, and this is the focus of this Briefing, rural regions are also employment destinations for commuters from urban centres. There are also strong rural to rural economic linkages which are important in sustaining rural communities[3].

1. The WDC commissioned the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) to provide the Census 2011 commuting data.
2. The WDC Western Region is a particularly rural region and this is discussed in more detail in a supplementary note to this Policy Briefing available at http://www.wdc.ie/publications/reports-and-papers/
3. See for example Harris, S., Alasia, A. and Bollman, R. 2008, *Rural Commuting: Its Relevance to Rural and Urban Labour Markets* Statistics Canada, Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin.

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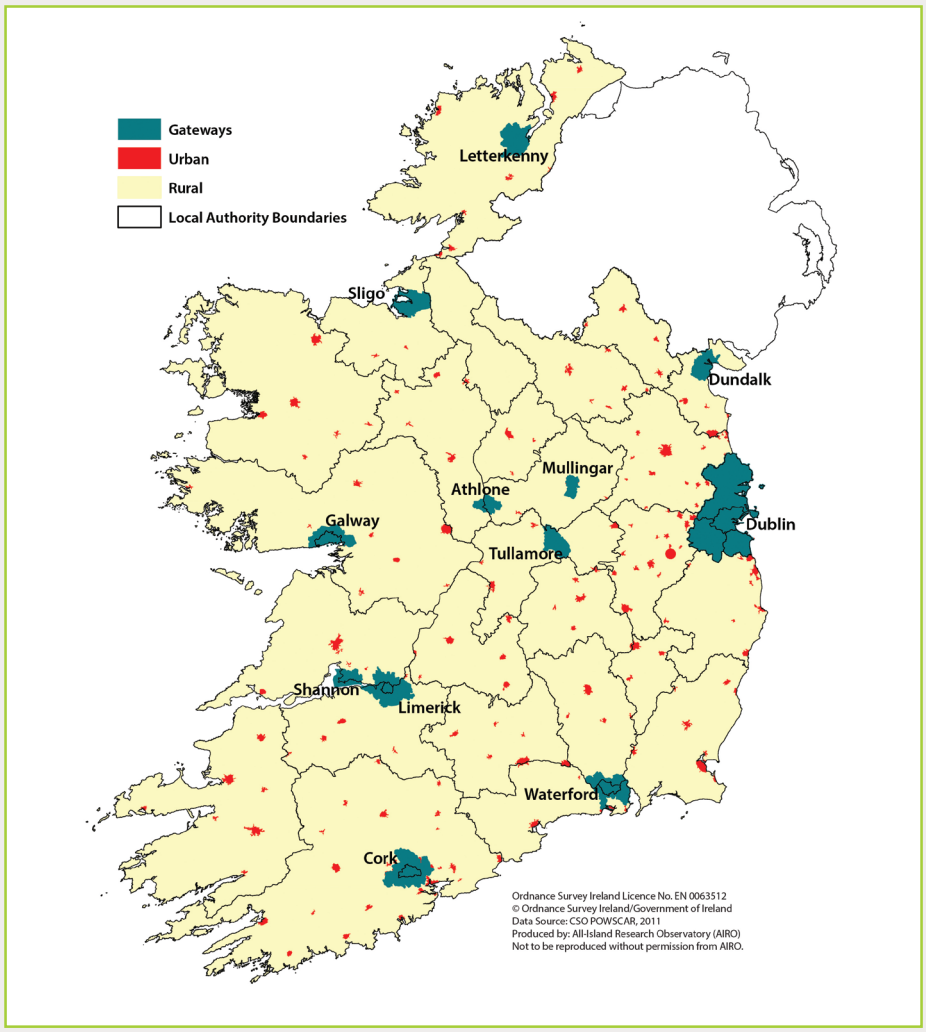
When employment opportunities are available, people return from overseas or from urban centres to more rural and regional areas to take up positions there.

In periods of high unemployment an important policy consideration is the extent to which new job opportunities in an area are filled by the resident unemployed/underemployed or by changed commuting patterns. Some research on commuting and employment creation has found that in urban areas, more jobs were filled by non-resident commuters, whereas in cases of employment creation in rural areas, there was a greater reduction of out commuting as rural dwellers took up the new opportunities there[4]. Labour is mobile and people follow jobs as the current and previous high rates of emigration attest. When employment opportunities are available, as experience from the Western Region has shown, people return from overseas or from urban centres to more rural and regional areas to take up positions there[5]. This suggests that rural dwellers are likely to avail of new job opportunities in rural areas and policies to support the rural economy should include local job creation.

Definitions – rural, urban, gateway

The definitions of rural and urban are subject to debate and many would regard smaller towns as rural rather than urban. There are also important differences between remote rural areas and rural areas close to urban centres[6]. In this Briefing the focus is on commuting from rural to urban (towns and gateways, see Map 1).

Map 1: Gateways, urban and rural areas



4. The study of rural commuting in North Carolina also suggests that urban employers draw their labour supply from a wider geographic area (including nearby rural areas) than do rural businesses. Renkow, M. NC State Economist, Agriculture and Resource Economics, July/August 2002 North Carolina State University *Rural Employment Growth: Who Gets the Jobs?*
5. There are many examples of people who moved to the West of Ireland during the last period of economic growth, for both employment opportunities and lifestyle reasons, documented at www.lookwest.ie.

The definitions are as follows:

- Rural is defined using the CSO classification as settlements with a population of fewer than 1,500 and open countryside.
- Towns are those population centres of 1,500 and above but excluding the nine NSS gateways.
- Gateways are defined as the legally defined boundaries of the nine NSS gateways plus all electoral divisions (EDs) which adjoin their boundaries.

Commuting patterns – the latest figures

The total number commuting to work in 2011 was 1.66 million, a decline from 1.79 million in 2006, reflecting the decline in employment in this period. Apart from this recent contraction, commuting has been increasing with a period of uninterrupted growth between 1986 and 2006[7]. Commuting increased partly due to higher employment but also due to rising house prices which influenced place of residence as well as increasing car ownership, road network improvements and better public transport services.

The total number commuting to work in 2011 was 1.66 million.

Where do workers live?

In 2011 there were 1.7 million workers of which 35.5% were rural dwellers (Figure 1). However just over a fifth (21.3%) of all jobs were located in rural areas, indicating that commuting to urban areas is an important aspect of work for rural dwellers[8].

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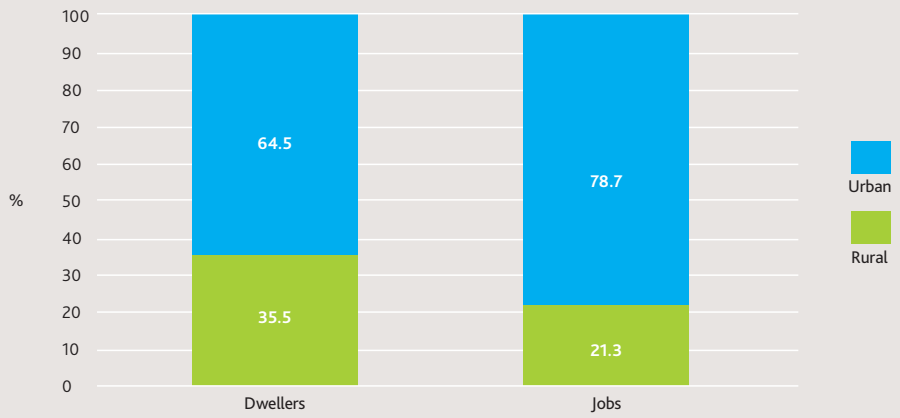
Figure 1: Place of residence and place of work, 2011



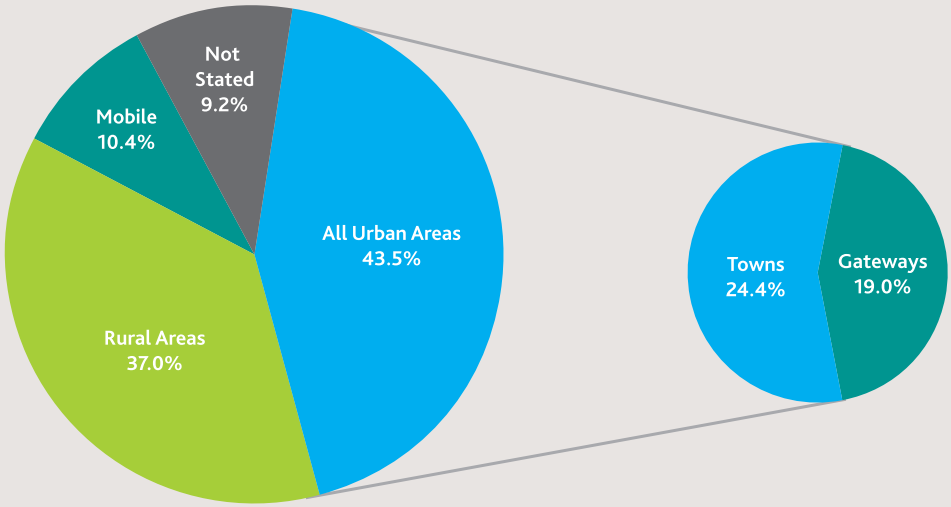
Where do rural dwellers work?

Of the 629,382 workers living in rural areas, over a third (37%) work in rural areas (Figure 2). However, the most significant employment destination for rural dwellers is urban areas accounting for 43.5%. Within this, towns account for a quarter (24.4%)[9] and close to one fifth (19%) of all rural dwellers commute to work in gateways. The remainder are classified as mobile workers (10.4%) or not stated (9.2%).

The most significant employment destination for rural dwellers is urban areas accounting for 43.5%.

6. This more nuanced categorisation is beyond the scope of this Briefing. The issues are discussed in the supplementary note to this Policy Briefing at http://www.wdc.ie/publications/reports-and-papers/
7. CSO, Census 2011, Profile 10 – Door to Door, p.7.
8. Much of the employment nationally is located in the five principal cities accounting for 45% of all job locations (excluding mobile workers) in 2011, up from 44% in 2006. See footnote 7, p.20
9. Small towns play an important role in supporting the rural economy and particularly so in parts of the West. See WDC, 2003, *Jobs for Towns, Small and Medium-Sized Towns on Radial Routes in the Western Region,* WDC, 2007, *Rural Businesses at Work: Case Studies of Rural Enterprises in the Western Region.*

Figure 2: Rural dwellers by place of work, 2011



Profile of rural dwellers commuting to towns and gateways

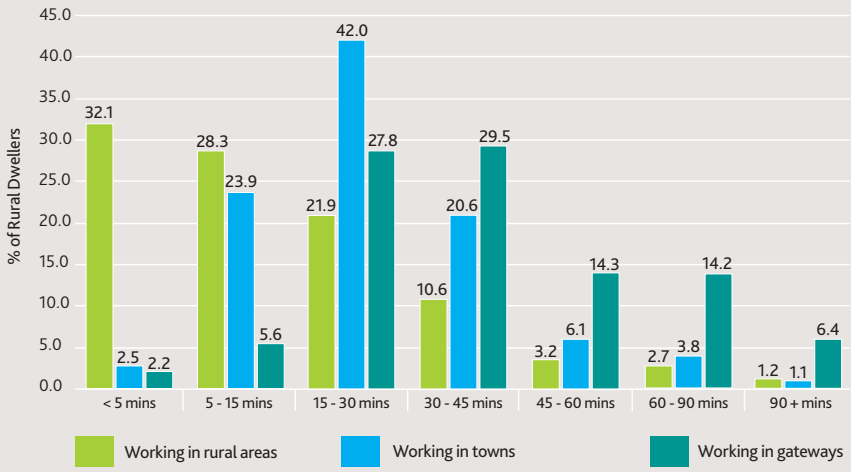
This section examines some labour market characteristics of those rural dwellers who commute to towns and gateways (24.4% and 19% respectively). The profile of rural dwellers working in rural areas is illustrated for comparison.

Travel time

Two thirds of rural dwellers who commute to work in towns live within a 30 minute travel time.

The most common travel time for rural dwellers working in towns is 15-30 minutes (42%), followed by 5-15 minutes (23.9%). Two thirds of rural dwellers who commute to work in towns live within a 30 minute travel time and close to 90% are within 45 minutes.

Figure 3: Rural dwellers' journey times to work by place of work, 2011



For those rural dwellers working in gateways, the most common travel time is 30-45 minutes (29.5%). Over 35% of rural dwellers live within 30 minutes of the gateway in which they work, indicating that many are living close by. Nonetheless this is half the share of rural dwellers living within 30 minutes of the town in which they work (68.4%). Some rural residents working in gateways will have previously lived in the gateway and now reside in adjacent rural areas and in some cases suburban and urban located employment can be as accessible to rural dwellers as to urban dwellers.

Differences between rural dwellers commuting to towns and those commuting to gateways is evident for

journey times greater than 30 minutes with over one fifth (20.6%) commuting for over an hour to gateways, compared to just 4.9% with this journey time to towns. Close to 35% of rural dwellers commuting to gateways travel 45 minutes or more, compared to just 11% of those commuting to towns, illustrating a greater degree of long distance commuting to gateways. The small share (6.4%) of rural dwellers working in gateways with a journey time greater than 90 minutes suggests that this is the general extent of the gateways' catchment though this will vary depending on size of gateway[10].

Close to 35% of rural dwellers commuting to gateways travel 45 minutes or more.

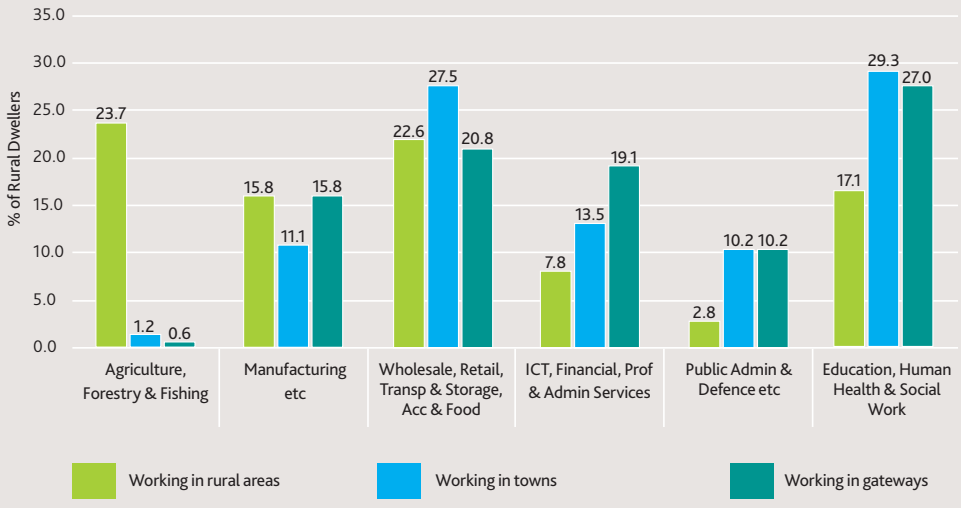
Beyond 90 minutes travel time can be considered remote rural, where distance, journey time and transport services mean that they are beyond reasonable commuting distance to gateway employment. Consideration of acceptable daily commutable distances and the mode, quality and cost of transport are relevant here. A distance of 60km has been used to measure the labour supply catchment for foreign direct investment (FDI)[11] while the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 considered a distance of 45km acceptable[12].

Industry

Rural dwellers working in towns are predominantly employed in education, human health and social work activities (29.3%), wholesale, retail etc. (27.5%) and information and communications technology (ICT), financial, professional and administration services (13.5%) (Figure 4). The two mainly public sectors of education, human health and social work activities and public administration and defence account for 40% of employment of rural dwellers in towns, indicating the significant role the public sector plays in the employment profile of towns. Employment in the manufacturing sector is particularly low in towns (11.1%) compared to rural areas and gateways where large scale manufacturing operations are more often located. The low rate of rural dwellers working in manufacturing in towns may suggest a need to more effectively support smaller scale manufacturing in towns.

The predominantly public sectors of employment account for 40% of employment of rural dwellers in towns.

Figure 4: Rural dwellers' industry of work by place of work, 2011



Rural dwellers employed in towns are more concentrated by sector compared to those employed in gateways. This means that towns may be more vulnerable to particular sectoral impacts, for example public sector cuts, particularly where there are large concentrations employed in those sectors. Towns are also more likely to be vulnerable as the level of activity is lower than in gateways, with some towns hosting just one or two large employers.

Rural dwellers employed in towns are more concentrated by sector compared to those employed in gateways.

10. The geographic extent of travel to work areas and the various 'containment ratios' of labour catchments has been examined by the WDC, 2009, *Travel to Work and Labour Catchments in the Western Region.*
11. IDA presentation, November 2012.
12. Also known as the Croke Park Agreement. http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Public-Service-Agreement-2010-2014-Final-for-print-June-2010.pdf

The high value ICT, financial, professional and administration services sector is the third most significant among rural dwellers commuting to gateways.

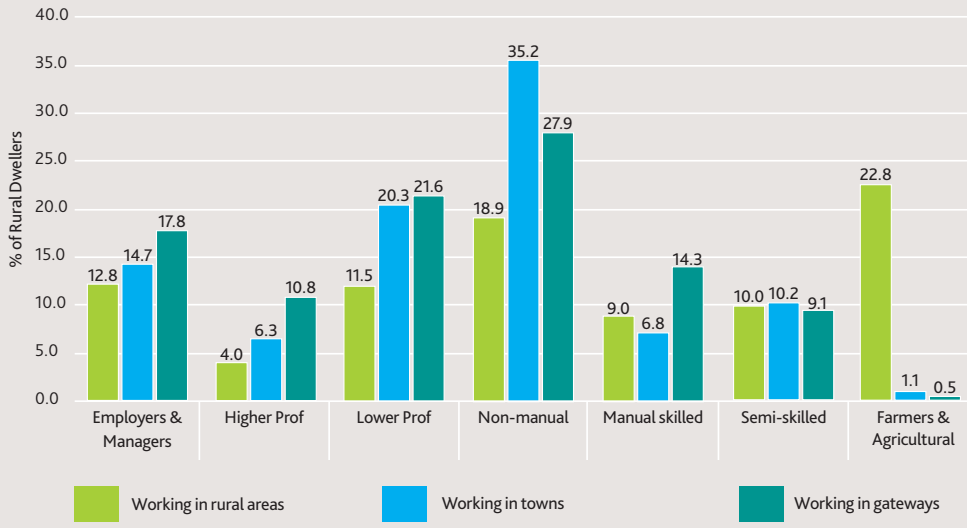
Within gateways, rural dwellers are employed in similar sectors to towns though there is a greater share employed in ICT, financial, professional and administration services (19.1%), and manufacturing (15.8%). The high value ICT, financial, professional and administration services sector is the third most significant among rural dwellers commuting to gateways. The case study data (see page 9) shows that Galway and Sligo are underrepresented compared to the average of 19.1% employed in this sector, while Waterford is similar to the average. It is likely that the high share in the ICT, financial, professional and administration sector reflects much rural commuting into Dublin and to a lesser extent Cork, where much of this employment is located.

Socio-economic group

The socio-economic group reflects occupation and employment status and is heavily influenced by the sectoral profile. Figure 5 shows that of those rural dwellers who work in towns, the largest socio-economic group is non-manual occupations, accounting for 35.2%. Considering those rural dwellers who commute to gateways, non-manual occupations are also the largest group accounting for 27.9% of the total. The next most significant group in both towns and gateways are lower professionals followed by employers and managers. Comparing this with rural dwellers working in rural areas the most significant socio-economic groups there are farmers, non-manual and employers and managers, indicating a higher degree of self-employment than in towns and gateways. Comparing the socio-economic groups of rural dwellers commuting to towns and gateways with the urban dwellers employed there, illustrates little difference suggesting that generally speaking rural dwellers are employed in similar occupations to their urban counterparts. For example the share employed as higher professionals in gateways is 11.1% among urban dwellers and 10.8% among rural dwellers. In contrast, just 4.7% of rural jobs are classed higher professional, indicating that rural dwellers commute to avail of professional positions in gateways and to a lesser extent in towns[13].

Generally speaking rural dwellers, working in towns and gateways are employed in similar occupations to their urban counterparts.

Figure 5: Socio-economic group of rural dwellers by place of work, 2011



Gender

A significant majority of rural dwellers working in towns are female.

A significant majority (62.2%) of rural dwellers working in towns are female, illustrating the importance of town based employment for the rural female labour force and rural income. The gender pattern of rural dwellers commuting to gateways is less marked but a majority of rural dwellers working in gateways is female (53.3%). Females are generally more likely to commute to urban areas as they are less likely to be engaged in the traditionally 'male' rural occupations such as agriculture.

13. Additional data on urban dwellers are in the supplementary note at http://www.wdc.ie/publications/reports-and-papers/

Figure 6: Gender of rural dwellers by place of work, 2011

Age

The age profile of those rural dwellers who commute to work in gateways is generally younger than those who commute to work in towns, which in turn is younger than those working in rural areas (Figure 7). Two thirds (66.7%) of rural dwellers commuting to gateways are aged under 45 years, compared to 60% of rural dwellers working in towns and half (50.7%) of rural dwellers working in rural areas. Lifecycle and lifestyle factors such as family formation and relocation from cities are factors influencing the extent of commuting as well as the older age profile of employment in rural areas, particularly agriculture.

The age profile of those rural dwellers who commute to work in gateways is generally younger than those who commute to work in towns, which in turn is younger than those working in rural areas.

Figure 7: Age of rural dwellers by place of work, 2011

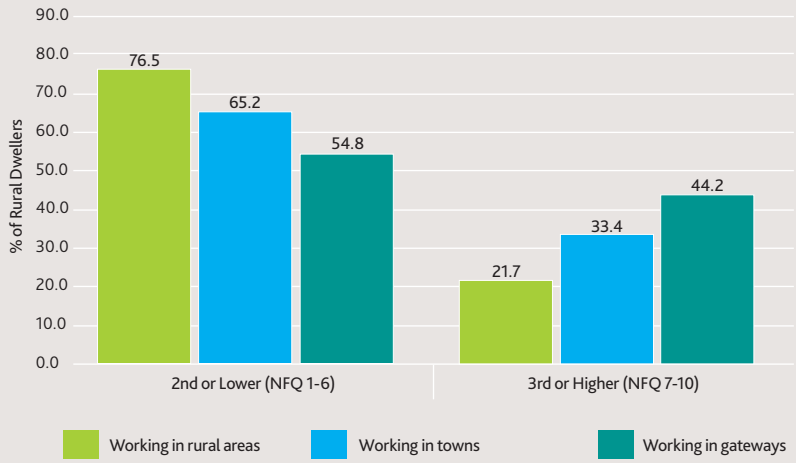
Education

The high share commuting to gateways aged 45 years and under is reflected in education levels. A higher share of those working in gateways (44.2%)[14] has third level compared to those working in towns (33.4%) and rural areas (21.7%). This share with third level or higher among rural dwellers commuting to gateways is similar to that of urban dwellers employed in the gateways (45.4%). In gateways, and to a lesser extent in towns, there are more highly qualified positions available compared to rural areas and well educated rural dwellers commute to avail of these positions. To some extent distance travelled correlates with increasing education levels as labour markets broaden from local to regional, national and international with greater levels of experience and education.

In gateways, and to a lesser extent in towns, there are more highly qualified positions available compared to rural areas and well educated rural dwellers commute to avail of these positions.

14. This is higher than the national average of 34.8% with third level or higher.

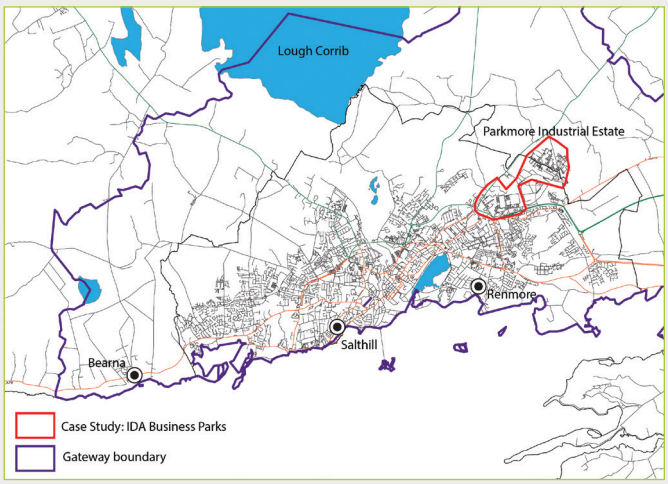
Figure 8: Rural dwellers' education level by place of work, 2011



Rural dwellers and foreign direct investment

The following case studies examine the commuting patterns of rural dwellers working in IDA business parks in three gateways; Galway, Sligo and Waterford[15]. This shows the extent to which rural dwellers form part of the labour supply of foreign owned state assisted employment[16] which has been growing strongly in recent years. Spatially identifying IDA assisted employment is often easier than indigenous employment as it is usually within business parks while the latter is more diffuse. The gateways chosen are located in different regions of Ireland, with a large rural hinterland and while not representative of all IDA employment, provide a good indication of the profile of rural dwellers employed in regional locations.

Map 2: Galway IDA business park case study

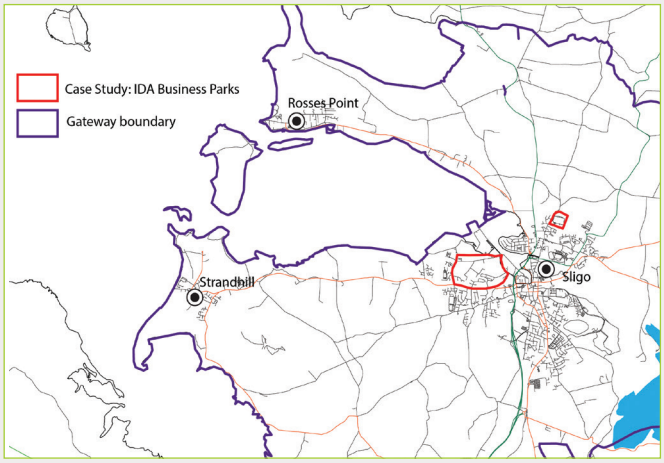


Of the 16,701 rural dwellers commuting to work within the gateway of Galway, one quarter commute to work in the IDA case study.

The Galway IDA case study in red (Map 2) includes Ballybrit, Parkmore and Galway Technology parks and includes companies such as Boston Scientific, Medtronic, SAP and Merit Medical. Of the 16,701 rural dwellers commuting to work within the gateway of Galway, one quarter (25.6% or 4,285) commute to work in the IDA case study.

15. All case study maps produced by All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) under Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0063512. Data Source: OSi and OpenStreetMap.
16. Within each IDA case study there may be some Enterprise Ireland assisted companies and small retail units but the majority of the workforce are employed in IDA assisted companies.

Map 3: Sligo IDA business park case study



The Sligo IDA case study (Map 3) has a dual location to include the AbbVie site to the north of the town and Finisklin business park with companies such as Abbott, Bruss, Stiefel and Elanco. There are 6,760 rural dwellers commuting to work within the gateway of Sligo, of which 18.6% (1,260) work in the IDA case study.

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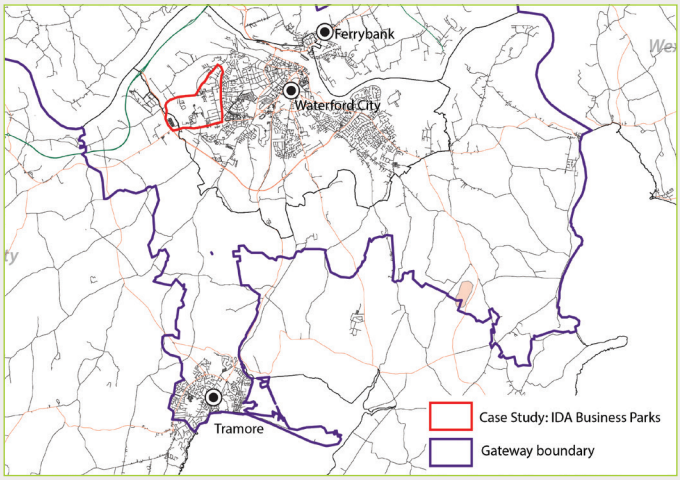
Map 4: Waterford IDA business park case study



The Waterford IDA case study in red (Map 4), is located on the Cork road to the west of the city and includes Bausch + Lomb, Teva and Honeywell. Over 6,600 rural dwellers commute to work in Waterford, of which a quarter (24.9% or 1,655) commute to work in the IDA case study. This share is comparable to Galway, but greater than the share in Sligo.

Over 6,600 rural dwellers commute to work in Waterford, of which a quarter work in the IDA case study.

Case study findings

The IDA case studies account for between 18% and 25% of all rural dwellers' employment within the gateways. The Galway, Sligo and Waterford case studies illustrate some similarities. A majority of rural dwellers working in the IDA parks have a journey time of 45 minutes or less, ranging from 84% in Sligo, 78% in Waterford and 75% in Galway, the share decreasing as the gateway size increases.

In contrast to rural dwellers working in gateways generally, where 53% are women, in the IDA parks females are in a minority.

In contrast to rural dwellers working in gateways generally, where 53% are women, in the IDA parks females are in a minority, ranging from 38.2% in Waterford and Galway to 44.7% in Sligo. This reflects the gender pattern of employment where many females commuting to the gateways are working in the public sector and retail rather than sectors represented in the IDA parks.

The industrial profile of each IDA case study is similar with the manufacturing sector accounting for over 60% of rural dwellers' employment, (Galway 69%, Sligo 68.5%, Waterford 60%). This is followed by the ICT sector accounting for close to one fifth (19.6%) of rural dwellers working in IDA parks in Waterford, 15.4% in Galway and 13.9% in Sligo.

The industrial profile of each IDA case study is similar with the manufacturing sector accounting for over 60% of rural dwellers' employment.

Rural dwellers working in the IDA parks are more concentrated in the 35-44 years category (36.6% in Sligo, 39.8% Waterford, 41.7% in Galway), compared to those working in gateways generally (33.7%).

Rural dwellers working in the IDA parks in Waterford (36.2%), Galway (40.3%) and Sligo (40.7%) are less likely to have a third level education compared to those working in the wider gateway (40.6%, 44% and 41.6% respectively). This lower share with third level is reflected in the fact that semi-skilled employment is the single largest socio-economic group in the IDA parks (31.3% in Galway, 27.8% in Sligo and 24.2% in Waterford).

Higher professional employment is particularly significant in the Galway IDA case study (20%); twice the share in the gateways generally and in the other IDA parks (10%). In contrast to the gateways and other IDA case studies, in the Galway IDA case study, higher professional employment is equally significant among men and women indicating a particularly strong female representation there. This may be due to sectoral concentrations or specific firm concentrations but this detail is not available from the data.

Policy conclusions and implications

The extent to which rural dwellers commute for work gives rise to some important findings and policy implications for both gateways and towns which are discussed separately below.

Gateways

One in five of all rural dwellers commute to work in one of the nine NSS gateways.

One in five (19% or 119,756) of all rural dwellers commute to work in one of the nine NSS gateways[17].

Over one third of these rural dwellers have journey times of 45 minutes or more and gateways' catchments can extend to a journey time of 90 minutes or longer. Commuting to work, particularly over long distances, is not necessarily desirable or sustainable and is not proposed as a policy solution to a lack of opportunities in rural areas. However many rural dwellers do see it as a viable option in the absence of alternatives closer to home.

A higher share of rural dwellers working in gateways have third level education compared to those working in towns and rural areas.

Rural dwellers working in gateways have longer journey times to work compared to those working in the three IDA case studies. This is probably explained by the location of IDA parks outside town centres making them slightly more accessible to the rural commuting population than other sources of gateway employment.

A higher share of rural dwellers working in gateways has third level education compared to those working in towns and rural areas. Rural dwellers have the skills to avail of employment opportunities in gateways and the evidence shows that within a certain radius and with access to transport, many rural dwellers choose to travel long distances to access better employment opportunities located in gateways.

Not surprisingly, the industrial profile of rural dwellers working in gateways generally is more diverse than in the IDA parks. Some gateways have particularly concentrated employment profiles, for example in the Sligo gateway over a third (34.1%) of all rural dwellers are engaged in the education, human health and social work sector which may indicate a relative lack of industrial employment compared to other gateways.

Commuting from gateways to smaller towns has enabled some companies to locate in these smaller centres while accessing the labour supply of the larger centre.

Gateways have large catchments, some of which contain smaller towns, for example, Galway has a large catchment which encompasses towns such as Gort, Loughrea and Tuam. Commuting from gateways to smaller towns has enabled some companies to locate in these smaller centres while accessing the labour supply of the larger centre e.g. medical devices companies in Gort and Loughrea are within the Galway city catchment[18]. A large software services company moved to Carlow to avail of the locally available workforce, some of whom would have previously commuted to Dublin[19]. Meteo Group, a small international software company moved to Ennis, Co. Clare in order to access the adjacent larger labour supply in Limerick and Galway[20]. Smaller centres within commuting distance of gateways can be attractive locations for enterprise.

Towns

Towns are the employment destination for nearly a quarter of all working rural dwellers.

Towns are the employment destination for nearly a quarter (24.4%) of all working rural dwellers. Women comprise 62%, indicating town based employment is very important to the rural female labour force and most rural dwellers live within a 30 minute travel time.

Public sector employment such as education and health and the sector of wholesale, retail, transportation and storage, accommodation and food services are the most important, which combined account for 57%

17. From the gateway perspective, rural dwellers are an important source of labour supply, accounting for 14.7% of all workers employed in gateways.
18. The Galway city labour catchment extends to the County Galway boundary and beyond, see footnote 10.
19. http://www.idaireland.com/news-media/press-releases/unum-establishing-softwar/
20. WDC, 2012, *Connecting the West, Next Generation Broadband in the Western Region.*

of rural dwellers' employment in towns. Government policy determining the location of these jobs will have a significant impact on towns and the employment of rural dwellers. For example, early retirement and the recruitment embargo within the public sector are likely to have a disproportionate effect where this employment is concentrated.

Government policy can also influence the location of private sector employment. Job creation in sectors such as ICT, finance and manufacturing in the smaller gateways and towns is influenced by Government policy and its agencies. Enterprise policy to-date has failed to reach the regional targets[21] which aim to locate 50% of FDI outside of Dublin and Cork[22], and in 2013 the figure was 30%[23]. In fact over a ten year period since 2001, the evidence suggests an increasing concentration of FDI in Dublin and to a lesser extent Cork and Galway[24]. The location of new employment opportunities will be influenced by the extent to which the current pattern towards concentration will continue or whether there will be more proactive policies to ensure dispersal to a wider range of gateways and towns.

Proactive policies are needed to ensure dispersal of new employment opportunities to a wider range of gateways and towns.

While it is clear that not everywhere can, or should aspire to, host large enterprises, the issue of scale has been largely absent from the debate. Towns of varying sizes host both indigenous and foreign state assisted enterprises. Smaller companies and sites of larger companies successfully operate outside the large centres and some from quite small towns. Towns which have been successful in increasing foreign agency assisted employment over the last decade include Bantry/Clonakilty, Clonmel/Carrick-on-Suir, Mallow/Mitchelstown and Carrick-on-Shannon[25].

There are also many indigenous companies exporting successfully from smaller centres, examples from the Western Region include CMS Peripherals, (Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo), E&I Engineering, (Burnfoot, Co. Donegal), Merenda Ltd, (Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim), C&F Tooling, (Athenry, Co. Galway), Cora Tine, (Falcarragh, Co. Donegal), McHale Engineering Limited, (Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo), and Ansamed, (Boyle, Co. Roscommon). All these companies cite the available labour supply as a positive attribute of their more rural location, as staff turnover tends to be lower[26]. Larger enterprises also operate successfully from towns e.g. Avant Card in Carrick-on-Shannon.

From a labour supply perspective, towns draw on a large supply of well qualified rural dwellers. Towns should be recognised as a resource with access to a well-educated labour supply drawn from a 45 minute catchment, largely engaged in non-manual and lower professional occupations, often within the public sector. Policy needs to support towns' existing employment base as well as supporting diversification where possible, for example into small scale manufacturing and international services.

Towns should be recognised as a resource with access to a well-educated labour supply.

With the success of Dublin in particular in attracting FDI and employment, and with consequent concerns now being expressed regarding capacity constraints such as commercial property availability, increasing rents and housing shortages in certain areas[27]; other regions, gateways and towns without these constraints but with the same regulatory and tax regime should now be in a position to benefit from mobile investment. The improved road network, as well as energy and telecommunications investment across the country offers alternative, attractive and cost competitive locations from which to do business.

The international evidence suggests that policy can effectively influence the location of FDI. Research in the UK has found that regional policy can and did effectively alter the location of FDI in favour of the north. However when the policy weakened, investment reverted to an earlier location pattern. This shows that regional policy can alter the location decisions of mobile investment but to maintain effectiveness policy needs to continue to be regionally focused[28].

Regional policy can alter the location decisions of mobile investment but to maintain effectiveness policy needs to continue to be regionally focused.

21. 2014 Action Plan for Jobs, p. 55, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2014.
22. IDA, 2010, Horizon 2020.
23. http://www.idaireland.com/news-media/press-releases/ida-ireland-reports-13-36/index.xml
24. Breathnach, P, *Spatial trends in employment in foreign firms in Ireland, CEDRA Research Paper, forthcoming.*
25. See footnote 24.
26. See www.wdc.ie and www.lookwest.ie
27. Minister for Finance reported in The Irish Independent 30 January 2014.
28. Wren, C. and Jones, J. 2012, FDI Location across British Regions and Agglomerative Forces: A Markov Analysis, Spatial Economic Analysis, June 2012.

Summary

Rural dwellers who commute to towns and gateways comprise a very important element of the rural economy accounting for 43.5% of all working rural dwellers. While there are many sectors with rural growth potential, for example tourism, agrifood and renewable energy, income generation and employment for rural dwellers will continue to depend in part on commuting to urban centres.

Policy responses on employment for rural dwellers will need to recognise the role of commuting and have a specific town and gateway focus. The new Spatial Strategy and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies[29] need to recognise the commuting patterns of rural dwellers as well as the capacity of smaller towns and cities to host smaller scale foreign and indigenous export oriented enterprises. While recognising scale issues, the labour supply resident in rural areas, along with multi-directional commuting, underpinned by the right institutional and policy supports, can promote greater dispersal of indigenous and FDI employment creation to the smaller gateways and towns. This in turn will benefit these centres and their rural hinterlands and potentially reduce the extent to which long distance commuting is a feature of rural employment.

In the absence of policy interventions aimed at dispersing employment growth there is likely to be ever greater pressure on rural dwellers to commute or migrate to take up jobs located in the larger gateways. Rural dwellers living in more remote rural regions are beyond the catchment of gateways and for these, employment opportunities in adjacent towns as well as rural areas are very important.

A greater regional focus through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies should identify different types of rural commuting, for example the greater Dublin commuting belt, is likely to be different to the commuting patterns in the North West or West, and consider appropriate policy responses. It will be important that the regional strategies do not focus exclusively on the gateways within their regions, but also promote the role and capacity of towns as centres for employment growth. On this basis appropriate policy responses for the benefit of rural dwellers can be devised.

The new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies need to recognise the commuting patterns of rural dwellers as well as the capacity of smaller towns and cities to host smaller scale foreign and indigenous export oriented enterprises.

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29. See footnote 21, p56.

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