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## CHAPTER 31

### Employment and population 1996-2016: growth, recession and delayed recovery

MARY CAWLEY

#### Introduction

The two decades from 1996 to 2016 included a period of rapid economic growth internationally, until about 2008, followed by a deep recession from which many countries are still recovering.<sup>1</sup> These changes impacted on the size, composition and distribution of Ireland’s population including that of County Roscommon. Rapid economic growth, followed by recession, took place within the context, inter alia, of advances in communication and information technologies, notably the increased role of the internet, growing liberalisation of financial markets and of international trade, reduced travel costs and housing-market failures.<sup>2</sup> Information, investment, goods and people moved at increased frequency over greater distances. Ireland was already networked with many countries internationally through attracting overseas investment, membership of the European Union (EU), a long history of labour migration, especially to Great Britain (GB), the United States (US), Canada and Australia, and of church missionary migration to the Americas, Asian and African countries.<sup>3</sup> The pace of change quickened and the directions of migration became more diverse during 1996-2016. This chapter discusses some of the ways in which broader processes of change found expression in County Roscommon.

The chapter is based primarily on census of population data for the four census periods 1996-2002, 2002-2006, 2006-2011 and 2011-2016. Change is discussed at two different geographical scales: (i) the county, where comparisons are made with the state; and (ii) urban and rural areas within the county. Additional official and academic sources are used in order to help understand the underlying influences. By way of introduction, broader international and national trends are outlined.

## **Economy and society within an international context, 1996-2016: state and county**

### *The state*

Ireland is a small open economy which has pursued a policy of attracting overseas investment in manufacturing since the 1960s and in advanced services more recently.<sup>4</sup> This policy has brought employment but has increased vulnerability to international demand, regulation and the corporate decisions of company headquarters located overseas.<sup>5</sup> Because of the relatively small size of the domestic economy, exports and overseas demand are of critical importance for the successful operation of many manufacturing and advanced service enterprises. As is well documented, Ireland experienced some of the highest rates of economic growth in the OECD countries between 1998 and 2007.<sup>6</sup> Labour shortages began to emerge in both specialist and less-skilled employment and former emigrants (Irish people who had migrated overseas) were attracted back.<sup>7</sup> Participation by women in the labour force increased gradually, facilitated, in part, by improved childcare provision.<sup>8</sup> It became necessary also to recruit labour overseas to meet immediate demands for nurses and technologists and to fill vacancies in agriculture, food processing and catering.<sup>9</sup>

Labour in migration to Ireland from ten central and eastern European states increased, in preparation for and particularly after, their accession to membership of the EU on 1 May 2004.<sup>10</sup> Because of growing labour shortages, Ireland, Britain and Sweden permitted immediate access to their labour markets for members of the new accession states in 2004.<sup>11</sup> Ireland also received limited numbers of international asylum seekers and refugees fleeing war and political persecution, at this time.<sup>12</sup> The census of 2002 recorded growing diversity in the places of birth of residents. The numbers from individual countries were relatively small, except in the case of the British-born, many of whom were the children of returning Irish emigrants.<sup>13</sup>

Rapid economic growth from 1998 to 2007 was followed from 2008-2010 by a sudden and deep recession, as a result of both international and domestic factors which were deeply influenced by property market failures.<sup>14</sup> International economic recession had implications for export demand. Falling international demand coincided with the collapse of the domestic boom in land prices and the property sector.<sup>15</sup> Also, the exchequer had become excessively dependent on income from stamp duties and other taxes associated with property development. A property-driven economy supported high growth but it also sowed the seeds for the financial and economic crisis that followed.<sup>16</sup> Speculative housing construction was widely distributed throughout the state, including an extensive area of east and north Roscommon where a rural renewal tax relief scheme was introduced in 1998 to stimulate

housing development.<sup>17</sup> Many of the housing estates built in smaller places were unfinished or not fully occupied by the time that recession set in; occupied but still unfinished estates remained in County Roscommon in 2016.<sup>18</sup>

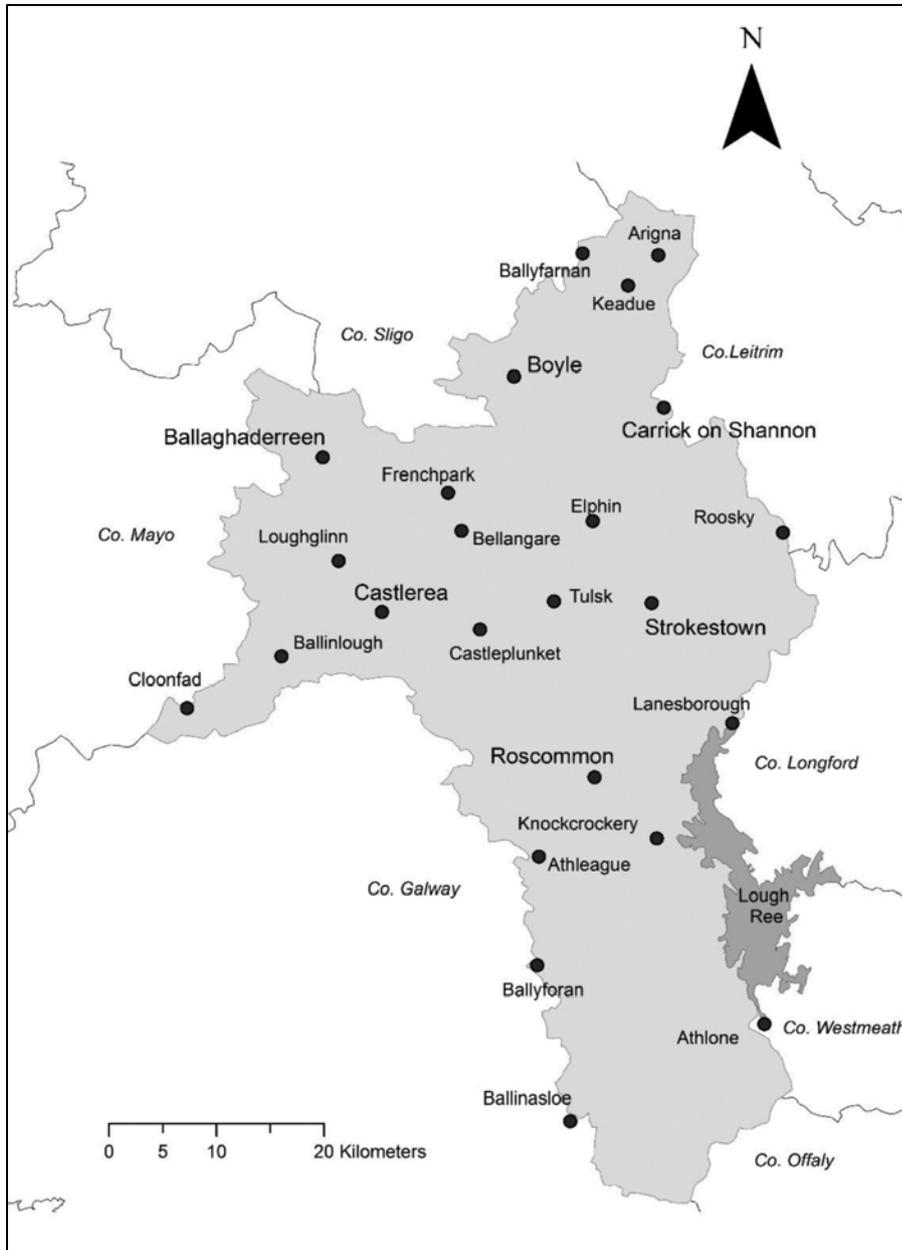
The collapse of the property market had severe implications for the banking sector and the national economy, including a need to obtain a bailout of €7.5 billion from the joint International Monetary Fund/EU stabilization fund in 2010.<sup>19</sup> Public expenditure on wages, salaries and capital projects was reduced and new revenue measures were introduced.<sup>20</sup> The collapse of the construction sector was immediately apparent in job losses in that sector, in falling taxation income from property development and in private expenditure more generally which reduced demand for a wide range of goods and services.<sup>21</sup> In early 2011, the total unemployment rate exceeded 14% and was to rise still further.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that ‘full employment’ is defined as an unemployment rate of approximately 4%.<sup>23</sup>

Following an established trend, migration overseas recommenced as recession took hold.<sup>24</sup> It included young Irish people, as in the past, recent European in migrants and unemployed middle-aged workers with families.<sup>25</sup> In 2012, the government established a Commission on the Economic Development of Rural Areas to address the deteriorating economic position of small towns and rural areas, including in County Roscommon.<sup>26</sup> Employment growth has taken place at a national level since 2012 but because of the economy’s “integration through trade and finance into a volatile global economy” it remains vulnerable “to the risks of reversals”.<sup>27</sup>

### *County Roscommon*

The longer-term processes of international integration through the attraction of overseas investment and growth of export markets were apparent in County Roscommon, as were associated vulnerabilities. A relatively small but, nevertheless, important source of local employment in a fragile economy is provided by a Dutch owned cigar factory, established in Ballaghaderreen, in 1978. The plant was closed and moved, in June 2017, to a lower cost site in Sri Lanka with a loss of 38 jobs.<sup>28</sup> The former Elan pharmaceutical plant, a major past employer, was opened by a US in migrant with Irish links, at Monksland west of Athlone in 1978, as a research and development facility.<sup>29</sup> It began manufacturing in 1985. Its history of employment in Athlone fluctuated over time in response to delays in the approval of and demand for particular drugs, expansion and restructuring of the company in the US and its eventual sale. The plant is now owned by another international pharmaceutical company. International labour in migration to Roscommon increased in the late 1990s from the impending EU accession states in central and eastern Europe.<sup>30</sup> Workers were recruited from Pakistan, in the early 1980s, to work in a Pakistani-owned Halal meat plant in

Ballaghaderreen and from Brazil, in the late 1990s, to work in meat plants in Athleague and Roscommon town (Fig. 1).<sup>31</sup> Small numbers of asylum seekers and refugees were provided with temporary accommodation in a number of towns, most notably Strokestown, Roscommon and Ballaghaderreen.<sup>32</sup>



**Fig.31.1:** County Roscommon towns.

Economic recession impacted on employment in Roscommon, as elsewhere in the state. The major changes that occurred are apparent from census information relating to the 'labour force'. The labour force is composed of the numbers of males and females aged 15 years and over at work plus the unemployed (either seeking their first job or having given up or lost a job).<sup>33</sup> The remainder of the population consists of working age women in the home, infants, schoolchildren, students, retirees or people who are unable to work. Throughout the two decades being reviewed, the proportion of males aged 15 years and over in County Roscommon's labour force varied between 69.0% and 64.5%, aligning closely with the state pattern.<sup>34</sup> For most of the period, less than 2% were unemployed and looking for their first job at state and county level, pointing to young people continuing in education or migrating elsewhere during the recession.<sup>35</sup> Unemployment, having given up or lost a previous job, ranged between a low of 4.9% in 2006 in Roscommon and 7.4% at state level and 21.7% and 20.7%, respectively, in 2011.<sup>36</sup> Recovery was apparent by 2016 but 12.3% of the male labour force was still unemployed in that year in the county and the state.

Participation by women in the labour force in Roscommon lagged behind the state level but increased, from approximately one-third of the total aged 15 years and over in 1996 to over 50% in 2016.<sup>37</sup> Similar to males, the proportions of women seeking their first job were low. Growing unemployment, having given up or lost a job, more than doubled between 2006 and 2011 (from 5.2% to 12.8%), but was lower than for males and slightly below the state level. The proportion of females unemployed was 10.6% in 2016. Females were less negatively affected by recession than were males, mainly because of limited involvement in building and construction.

Changes took place in employment by sector between 1996 and 2016 but there were also certain broad continuities (Table 1). 'Industrial sector', in the census reports, includes agriculture, construction, a wide range of services and manufacturing industry. Public and private services combined account for the largest proportion of those at work in County Roscommon, followed by manufacturing and then agriculture. The relative importance of different industrial sectors (the percentages of those at work that they account for) and changes in the numbers involved are presented in Table 1. Because the definition of categories used between 1996 and 2002 and 2011 and 2016 changed, the discussion focuses on information for a number of key sectors during the years of growth and recession, namely 2002, 2006 and 2011.<sup>38</sup>

Agriculture, forestry and fishing remained a more important source of (primarily male) employment in Roscommon than nationally in 2011 (17.1% versus 5.1% of those at work), although the numbers involved fell over time. Some 71% of farms in 2010 (the last full agricultural census) were engaged in specialist beef production and only 1.4% in specialist dairying, resulting in relatively low average direct incomes from farming (average monetary

value of agricultural output at farm-gate prices- excluding EU transfer payments received- was €13,508 in 2010); farming was a subsidiary occupation on almost 35% of farms and some 54.5% of farmers were 55 years of age or older.<sup>39</sup>

**Table 1: County Roscommon: males and females aged 15+ years, at work by selected industrial sectors, 2002-2011 (% and numbers at work)**

	Males			Females		
	2002	2006	2011	2002	2006	2011
<b>Total number at work</b>	<b>13288</b>	<b>15585</b>	<b>13269</b>	<b>7982</b>	<b>10244</b>	<b>11121</b>
Agriculture, forestry and fishing (%)	19.5	15.5	17.1	2.5	1.8	1.6
<i>Number</i>	2597	2420	2273	202	186	178
Manufacturing industries (%)	15.7	13.8	12.8	10.2	8.6	7.2
<i>Number</i>	2090	2150	1702	816	883	804
Construction (%)	17.4	22.7	10.0	0.9	1.5	0.7
<i>Number</i>	2308	3536	1321	73	154	82
Wholesale and retail trade (%)	11.9	11.9	15.0	14.1	14.7	15.0
<i>Number</i>	1578	1851	1994	1125	1509	1666
Hotels and restaurants (%)	2.6	2.7	3.8	6.1	6.2	6.0
<i>Number</i>	348	423	501	488	632	667
Real estate renting and business activities (%)	4.1	4.6	5.8	6.0	6.2	7.2
<i>Number</i>	551	713	774	476	639	802
Public administration and defence (%)	6.3	6.1	8.9	10.4	8.5	10.7
<i>Number</i>	838	944	1182	833	870	1191
Education (%)	2.7	2.8	3.4	11.8	11.9	15.1
<i>Number</i>	355	429	454	940	1222	1676
Health and social work (%)	3.0	3.0	3.5	21.6	23.3	20.8
<i>Number</i>	401	466	466	1724	2384	2317
Other community, social and personal services (%)	1.8	2.2	2.7	4.2	5.3	4.9
<i>Number</i>	235	347	364	339	541	543

*Note:* the totals do not add to 100% because not all industrial sectors are included  
*Sources:* Census2002, Vol 5, *Principal economic status and industries*, Table 13B, 13C; Census2006, Vol 7, *Principal economic status and industries*, Tables 13B, 13C; Census2011, Table CD219 ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie))

Male and female manufacturing employment increased slightly, in numerical terms, between 2002 and 2006, but declined as a proportion of the total (Table 1). Employment in manufacturing employment then fell for both groups but particularly for males, between 2006 and 2011, to which losses in meat processing plants in Ballaghaderreen (80 jobs), Roosky (85 jobs) and Roscommon (54 jobs) contributed.<sup>40</sup> The growing importance of the construction sector for males during the years of economic growth is readily apparent as is the impact of its collapse during 2006-2011 when employment fell by 62.6% (Table 1). Employment in wholesale and retail trade increased between 2002 and 2011 for both males and females. Public administration and defence declined in relative terms, as a source of employment, between 2002 and 2006 although the numbers of both males and females employed grew slightly; this sector increased relatively and numerically during the recession, as other sectors declined. The increased importance of public sector employment more generally for females is apparent: in 'education' (until 2011), 'health and social work' (until 2006), and for both males and females in 'other community, social and personal services' (between 2002 and 2006) (Table 1). Some of the employment in health-related activities arises from the expansion of public and private nursing homes and home care for the elderly.<sup>41</sup> Private service sector employment in hotels and restaurants registered modest growth for males and females between 2002 and 2011. Both male and female employment in real estate renting and business activities also increased during the economic boom and continued, especially for females, between 2006 and 2011.

An assessment of the economic position in the county in 2016 by Roscommon County Council highlights the decline that occurred in the number of enterprises in construction and wholesale and retail trade (where larger supermarkets and chains were replacing smaller shops) between 2006 and 2011.<sup>42</sup> Although small in number, professional, scientific and technical activities, and information and communication technologies, registered strong growth between 2011 and 2016.<sup>43</sup> The Western Development Commission (WDC) identified key weaknesses, in 2016, in the enterprise environment: lower levels of new business formation, than in most other counties; low levels of agency-assisted employment and of foreign direct investment; a dominance of microenterprises serving local markets; and a high dependency on traditional sectors with low growth potential.<sup>44</sup> Small and medium size enterprises have received funding and other supports from the EU and nationally supported Leader programme, the former county development board, the county enterprise centres, and the WDC investment fund as part of rural development measures over time.<sup>45</sup> The county also contains a wealth of natural and cultural heritage resources of national and international status which form a basis for primarily seasonal employment, currently, but which it is planned to develop further.<sup>46</sup> Examples include Lough Key Forest Park, the National Famine Museum in Strokestown, the Arigna Mining Experience and Museum, the Rathcroghan Visitor Centre in Tulsk, King House in Boyle and Boyle Abbey. Cruise-boat hire is well established on the River Shannon and its tributaries and lakes support a wide range of outdoor recreational activities that provide employment locally.

### Change in population size and composition: 1996-2016

Economic change has implications for the number and composition of the population but the relationships are complex.<sup>47</sup> The focus here is on the main patterns of change. The population of County Roscommon grew between 1996 and 2016 (from 51,897 to 64,544 people) but, because of a relatively low rate of growth, has remained at about 1.4% of the state total (Table 2). The density of population is low compared to that in the state overall (25.33 versus 70 persons per square kilometre in 2016). Change in population is expressed in the remainder of the chapter as an average annual percentage over a census period, instead of a total percentage change. Average annual values permit change over time to be traced more accurately because the intervals between censuses differed.<sup>48</sup> Growth was below that for the state during 1996-2002 and 2011-2016 but exceeded that for the state between 2002-2006 and 2006-2011 (Table 2). The reasons for these differences are discussed below.

**Table 2: State and County Roscommon: population 1996 and 2016 and average annual % intercensal change**

	Population		Total % change 1996-2016	Average annual % change			
	1996	2016		1996-2002	2002-2006	2006-2011	2011-2016
State	3626087	4761865	31.3	1.3	2.1	1.6	0.8
Roscommon	51975	64544	24.2	0.6	2.3	1.8	0.1

Sources: Census1996, 2002, 2006, Volume 1, *Population classified by area*, Table 1; Census 2011, *Preliminary results final*, Table 1; Census2016, Table A0402 ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie))

In order to understand population change, it is pertinent to consider the influence of births, deaths and migration. Births add to the stock of population, mortality reduces numbers and migration can either add to or reduce numbers, as people move in to or out of an area. Net migration over a census period is calculated as the difference between the actual change in population numbers registered between two census years and natural increase (the term used

for the difference between births and deaths).<sup>49</sup> If the difference is positive, more people moved into an area than left; if it is negative, out migration exceeded in migration. Birth, death and net migration rates are expressed as a rate per 1000. At the level of the county, migration can include movement from and to other counties in Ireland as well as international movement.

The national trend between 1996 and 2016 was one of increasing birth rates until 2011, falling death rates and varying net migration rates (Table 3). Birth rates were lower in Roscommon than at state level during all four census periods (mainly because of the depleted numbers of women aged 15-44 years through past out migration) but corresponded with the national trend of increase in the first three census periods, followed by decline.<sup>50</sup> Increasing birth rates are associated, in part, with: (i) reduced out migration among women in their twenties and thirties (the main childbearing years), as employment opportunities increased; and (ii) births of children to in migrant women from elsewhere in the state or from outside the state. Death rates were higher in Roscommon than at state level, throughout the twenty years, reflecting an older age structure (the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over exceeded that for the state at each of the four censuses, being 16.6% versus 13.4% of the total in 2016).<sup>51</sup> Death rates have fallen over time, because of improvements in living standards and health care.

**Table 3: State and County Roscommon: births, deaths and net migration for intercensal periods 1996-2016; average annual rate of change per 1000 average population**

		Annual average rate per 1000 average population			
		1996-2002	2002-2006	2006-2011	2011-2016
State	Births	14.3	15.0	16.5	14.8
	Deaths	8.2	7.0	6.4	6.3
	Net migration	6.8	11.4	5.4	-1.2
County Roscommon	Births	10.2	11.3	13.9	12.9
	Deaths	11.2	8.5	8.3	7.8
	Net migration	6.7	19.0	11.1	-4.0

*Sources:* Census1996, Table A0402 ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)); Census2002 and 2006, Vol 4, *Usual residence, birthplaces, migration and nationalities*, Table 2; Census 2011, *Preliminary results*, Table 5; Census2016, Table EP005 ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie))

Net migration rates varied markedly between Roscommon and at state level after 2002, with gains being much higher between 2002-2006 and 2006-2011 and losses being much greater between 2011 and 2016 (Table 3). The latter reflects the fact that the impacts of recession have persisted for longer in the county than in more urbanised areas of the state. Census age group data illustrate that out migration took place in the 15-19 and 20-24-year age groups during all four census periods associated with movement to higher education and employment outside the county.<sup>52</sup> The rate declined in the 20-24-year group between 2002 and 2011, as employment opportunities improved. In 2011-2016, losses through migration became evident in the male 25-29-year group (-10.6%) and to a lesser extent among females (-2.6%). There was also evidence of outward movement of both males and females aged 44-49 years.

Whilst out migration has taken place, the population has become increasingly diverse through in migration from elsewhere in the state and internationally, as the birthplaces of the residents reveal (Table 4). The proportion of residents born in the county at each census between 1996 and 2016 declined (from 67.8% to 44.9%). The proportion of residents born in England and Wales increased from 4.5% to 7.3% with the greatest growth taking place between 1996 and 2002, as the construction sector expanded. This conforms with a view that Irish migrants in the UK respond rapidly to increased demand in the home labour market, bringing children born in the UK with them.<sup>53</sup> Less than 1.0% of residents were born in Northern Ireland.

In migration took place from other counties in Ireland and from other countries. In 2016, almost 40% of the county's residents were born in another Irish county (Table 4). Over 50.0% of this movement in both 2010-2011 and 2015-2016 took place among the main working age groups (24-44 years) and 16.7% and 15.2%, respectively, among the 1-14 age group reflecting the movement of working age people, some of whom were accompanied by a child or children.<sup>54</sup> Three counties dominated: the adjacent counties of Westmeath and Galway, and Dublin.<sup>55</sup> Migration from Dublin is likely to have included both new migrants moving to employment but also the Dublin-born children of returning out migrants from Roscommon. It is of interest to note that in migration from Leitrim exceeded that from Mayo, pointing to new residential development on the Roscommon bank of the River Shannon, under the rural renewal scheme, attracting some of an expanding workforce in Carrick-on-Shannon.<sup>56</sup>

The proportion of Roscommon residents born in countries other than Ireland and the UK increased from 0.9% in 1996 to 7.7% in 2016 (Table 4). There had been small numbers of migrants from Continental Europe and the UK, as well as a range of other countries resident in the county for several decades but the sources of migrants expanded significantly<sup>57</sup>. In 2016, newer migrants came from more than fifty countries on all continents but the largest

**Table 4. County Roscommon: population usually resident and present on the census night by year and birthplace (%)**

Year	Total population	Birthplace (%)						
		Roscommon	Other county in State	Northern Ireland	England and Wales	Scotland	Total Ireland and UK	Elsewhere (other than Ireland and UK)
1996	51312	67.8	26.2	0.4	4.5	0.2	99.1	0.9
2002	53123	61.3	28.7	0.7	6.9	0.2	97.8	2.2
2006	58220	53.8	32.0	0.7	7.8	0.3	94.6	5.4
2011	63777	48.1	36.0	0.7	7.9	0.3	93.0	7.0
2016	64226	44.9	39.1	0.7	7.3	0.3	92.3	7.7

Sources: Census1996, Table A0427; Census2002, Table B0429; Census2006, Table C0428; Census2011, 2016, Table E7050 ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie))

*Sources:* Census 1996, Table A0427; Census 2002, Table B0429; Census 2006, Table C0428; Census 2011, 2016, Table E7050 ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)).

*Notes:* (i) The usually resident population, present on census night, differs slightly from the total population given in other tables. (ii) The census form asks that place of birth be entered as the ‘place where your mother lived at the time of your birth’. It is possible that some respondents entered a hospital location in the census form. Many births to Roscommon resident mothers since 1978 have taken place in hospitals in other counties. The maternity unit in the, then, Roscommon County Hospital was effectively closed in 1978 when the Health Board failed to appoint a consultant obstetrician-gynaecologist; see Oireachtas Debates, Private Members’ Business- hospital appointments: motion, Tuesday 17 October (1978) (<http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie>).

numbers came from a limited number of countries: Poland, Latvia and Lithuania in the EU, the USA, Brazil and Pakistan.<sup>58</sup> A proportion of people born in the USA are the children of one or both returning emigrant parents; others are associated with US branch plants established in the county, especially in the environs of Athlone. Most Polish, Lithuanian and other EU migrants were resident in towns or adjacent to towns in 2016.<sup>59</sup> As noted earlier, Pakistani and Brazilian nationals were recruited to work in meat processing plants in Ballaghaderreen, and in Roscommon and Athleague, respectively, and many have remained resident.<sup>60</sup> In migration has contributed to social and cultural diversity and enrichment but presents challenges, including meeting new educational, employment and service needs.<sup>61</sup>

### **County Roscommon: town and rural population**

The census differentiates between ‘aggregate town areas’, with a population of 1,500 and over, and ‘aggregate rural areas’ being the remainder of the population. In 2016, some 73.2% of Roscommon’s population lived in aggregate rural areas, almost twice the proportion at state level, making it one of the most rural Irish counties (Table 5). The proportion of the population living in aggregate town areas increased by 81.2%, between 1996 and 2016, but the total numbers are relatively low (Table 5).

#### *Town population change*

In 1996, three towns had a population in excess of 1,500 people (Roscommon, Boyle, Castlerea) (Fig. 1 and Table 5). The population of Ballaghaderreen did not reach 1,500 until 2006. The population of the county town and administrative centre of Roscommon recorded substantial annual growth until 2011-2016. Growth was greater in the environs than within the town boundary as suburbanisation took place. Population change in Boyle was more variable. The town area lost population over time whilst the environs increased their population, particularly between 2002 and 2006 when the annual increase equalled 16%. This high growth took place from a low base. It was associated, in large part, with the attraction of commuters who worked in Carrick-on-Shannon and Sligo to new residential development and the expansion of a nursing home for older people.<sup>62</sup> By 2011, 43.6% of the total town population lived in the environs. Business closures took place in the town centre, following the recession, which are attributed, in part, to increased competition from expansion in larger towns nearby.<sup>63</sup> The downsizing and sale of part of an international credit card company’s operation in Carrick-on-Shannon, in 2014, also impacted negatively on employees resident in the Boyle area between 2011 and 2016.<sup>64</sup>

**Table 5: County Roscommon: aggregate town and aggregate rural population, population of towns with 1500 population and over, and average annual % change 1996-2016**

Towns	Population	Average annual % change				Population	% change	% of county population
	1996	1996-2002	2002-2006	2006-2011	2011-2016	2016	1996-2016	2016
<b>County Roscommon</b>	51975	0.6	2.3	1.8	0.1	64544	24.2	
<b>Aggregate town areas</b>								
State	2107991	1.8	2.6	2.1	1.0	2985781	41.6	62.7
Roscommon	9546	1.9	8.7	3.2	0.8	17300	81.2	26.8
<b>Aggregate rural areas</b>								
State	1518096	0.7	1.3	0.9	0.4	1776084	17.0	37.3
Roscommon	42429	0.3	0.7	1.3	-0.1	47244	11.3	73.2
<b>Towns 1500+</b>								
<b>*Roscommon total</b>	3915	2.4	2.9	2.7	0.6	5876	50.1	9.1
Roscommon town area	1432	2.2	0.8	0.3				
Environs Roscommon	2483	2.6	4.1	3.9				
<b>*Boyle total</b>	2222	-0.1	3.6	0.5	-0.2	2588	15.6	4.0
Boyle town area	1690	-0.5	-0.7	-1.8				
Environs Boyle	532	0.9	16.1	4.5				
<b>Castlerea</b>	1790	0.0	1.2	1.2	0.1	1992	11.3	3.1
<b>Ballaghaderreen</b>	1248	2.3	5.4	1.2	-0.2	1808	44.9	2.8
% of county population in four named towns	17.6							19.0

\*Because of the disestablishment of legal towns, as part of the Local Government Reform of 2014, separate environs are no longer listed in the census for Boyle and Roscommon

Sources: Aggregate town and aggregate rural areas, Census 1996, Table AI103; Census 2002, Table B0103; Census 2006, Table C0103; Census 2011, Table CD112; Census 2016, Table E2004 (www.cso.ie)

Sources: Individual towns, Census 1996-2002, Table B0107; Census 2006, Table C0107; Census 2011, Table CD116; Census 2016, Table E2016 (www.cso.ie)

Castlerea and Ballaghaderreen were traditionally local service centres and market towns. The former had limited manufacturing activity but was the site of a psychiatric hospital, an important source of local employment, which closed in 1994, as part of the adoption of community based care, and was replaced by a prison in 1996.<sup>65</sup> Between 2011 and 2016, the rate of growth fell in Castlerea, and Ballaghaderreen experienced decline, revealing delay in recovering from the impacts of recession. Ballaghaderreen had a strong food processing industry for several decades, based on milk and meat processing and cigar manufacture, but experienced losses in employment beginning with the closure of the Halal meat plant by the then Irish owners in 2008.<sup>66</sup> Substantial losses occurred in employment in construction also. The town gained limited professional and managerial employment, in the late 1990s, from being designated as the location for the WDC and the Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly (Northern and Western Regional Assembly, since January 2015).<sup>67</sup> In January 2017, a new hotel that closed during the recession, was selected as a reception centre for 79 Syrian refugees.<sup>68</sup>

Between 1996 and 2006, as economic growth took place, Roscommon, Boyle and Castlerea recorded falling rates of unemployment, arising through loss of or giving up a job but unemployment remained high, especially among males (equal to or exceeding 8%), in the latter two towns (Table 6). The proportion of females having given up or lost a job in Ballaghaderreen was 14.1% in 2006. Unemployment escalated between 2006 and 2011, particularly among males, associated especially with the collapse of the construction sector. Unemployment rates fell between 2011 and 2016 but to a greater extent in Roscommon than in the other three towns. The proportions seeking first time employment in these three towns was higher in general than at a county level and varied considerably over time.

The overall picture emerging is one of considerable uncertainty associated with employment in the four towns but to a lesser extent in Roscommon, the administrative centre, than the other three. The four towns and the Monksland area west of Athlone qualified for the government's rural economic development zones scheme (REDZ) introduced in 2015.<sup>69</sup> These areas have been combined into one zone for Leader funding to support enterprise and job creation and regeneration for the period 2015-2020.<sup>70</sup> Some of these towns and smaller villages also qualified for combined funding of €75,508 for enterprise and community projects under a new town and village renewal scheme in 2017.<sup>71</sup>

When considering urban change in County Roscommon, the influence of towns located on the border in adjoining counties must be taken into account, especially Athlone and Carrick-on-Shannon. Population growth has been greatest in the south Roscommon environs of Athlone which have grown markedly over

**Table 6: County Roscommon: towns with a population of 1500 and over, % of the respective male and female resident labour force seeking employment for the first time (unemployed 1) and having given up or lost a job (unemployed 2)**

	% of the labour force									
	Males					Females				
	1996	2002	2006	2011	2016	1996	2002	2006	2011	2016
<b>Roscommon</b>										
Unemployed 1	0.2	1.8	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.1	1.6	1.7	2.2	2.1
Unemployed 2	9.3	6.2	4.0	22.8	13.0	5.0	4.6	5.4	12.6	12.9
<b>Boyle</b>										
Unemployed 1	4.0	2.2	2.1	2.6	2.6	2.2	1.4	2.0	1.5	2.8
Unemployed 2	17.8	11.0	10.1	29.1	22.4	11.7	7.2	6.7	18.5	16.4
<b>Castlerea</b>										
Unemployed 1	1.0	1.5	2.5	3.0	3.7	1.6	1.0	4.0	1.0	2.2
Unemployed 2	15.9	9.4	7.9	28.8	22.6	6.3	8.1	5.1	19.1	11.4
<b>Ballaghaderreen</b>										
Unemployed 1			1.9	1.9	4.3			3.3	4.3	1.8
Unemployed 2			7.9	32.5	27.1			14.1	25.0	24.3
<b>County Roscommon</b>										
Unemployed 1	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.4	1.3	1.3
Unemployed 2	9.3	6.3	4.9	21.7	12.3	7.0	5.6	5.2	12.8	10.6

Sources: Census 1996, Table A0507; Census 2002, Table B0507; Census2006, Table C0707; Census 2011, Table CD320; Census 2016, Table EB030 (www.cso.ie)

Note: the labour force includes those at work and unemployed.

time (Table 7, Figure 2A). Proximity to these employment centres is among the factors contributing to commuting to work in other counties: census data for 2016 show that 35.7% (9220) of those at work and resident in County Roscommon commuted to work in another county.<sup>72</sup> Closures and cutbacks in companies in these other locations also impacted on commuters resident in Roscommon, for example, in a credit card company and call centre in Carrick-on-Shannon in 2010-2011 and 2014 and in a pharmaceutical plant near Athlone in 2013<sup>73</sup>. Commuting also takes place in the opposite direction: 3,847 people resident in another county commuted to work in Roscommon in 2016.<sup>74</sup>

There are two other categories of towns: (i) those with a population between 500 and 1,500; and (ii) settlements with less than 500 population that are recognised as ‘census towns’, based on a number of criteria including having at least 50 occupied dwellings located in defined proximity to each other and having certain service functions.<sup>75</sup> Strokestown and Elphin had populations in excess of 500 during 1996-2016 (Table 7, fig. 1). Strokestown grew at relatively low rates, except in 2002-2006; Elphin lost population between 1996 and 2002 and then grew until 2011. Although an ancient ecclesiastical centre (5th century AD), after which the Catholic diocese, which includes most of Roscommon and Sligo is named, Elphin did not attain prominence as a commercial centre, possibly because of its location between Roscommon town and Boyle. The smaller category of census towns (with a population of less than 500 people) contains a larger number of places which are characterised by considerable variability over time (Fig. 1, Table 7). Almost all of these settlements experienced housing estate development during the 2000s, as part of the rural renewal scheme.<sup>76</sup> They attracted residents who commuted to work in larger centres, but unfinished and unoccupied properties are features.<sup>77</sup> Many small places are long recognised as villages but did not reach the definition of ‘census town’ until relatively recently.

#### *Rural population change: electoral divisions*

The town changes discussed above and change in population in more rural areas may be identified at the scale of 112 Electoral Divisions (EDs).<sup>78</sup> In many instances the populations are small and minor numerical changes between censuses can translate into a relatively high rate of change (e.g., a gain or loss of ten people out of one hundred equals change of 10%). Also the ED does not necessarily coincide with local parish or other community structures. Slightly more than 50% of EDs experienced decline or no change between 1996 and 2002.<sup>79</sup> During the years of economic growth nationally, between 2002-2006 and 2006-2011, almost 78% recorded growth. This proportion fell to 44.6% between 2011 and 2016. Only 12 EDs experienced growth throughout the twenty years. They are located in the environs of Athlone (Athlone West Rural, Cloonown,

**Table 7: County Roscommon: towns with less than 1500 population and census towns, average annual % change 1996-2016**

Towns	Popul- ation	Average annual % change				Population	
		1996- 2002	2002- 2006	2006- 2011	2011- 2016	2011	2016
*Environs Athlone	1214	5.7	13.3	10.7			
*Carrick-on-Shannon part	336	2.9	11.0	3.5			
*Lanesborough-Ballyleague	388	-0.9	9.5	6.2			
Strokestown	572	1.7	5.6	1.1	0.3	814	825
Elphin	545	-0.6	3.0	0.7	-1.6	613	565
Clontuskert	262	-1.7	-4.6	-0.5	-1.8	188	171
Frenchpark	290	3.9	6.7	-1.5	1.6	420	454
Ballinlough	205	4.0	0.8	2.9	0.0	300	300
*Roosky pt	186	0.1	14.7	7.7			
Ballyfarnan	231	-1.8	-2.9	2.5	-1.8	205	187
Keadew			3.2	-2.9	-3.5	187	154
*Environs Ballinasloe	69	11.8	5.7	-8.7			
Loughglinn	186	-0.4	3.6	-0.4	-2.0	204	184
Cloonfad				7.3	1.6	285	308
Bellanagare				1.2	1.5	142	153
Termonbarry					4.2	366	443
Knockcroghery					2.9	307	351
Athleague					0.6	241	248
Tulsk					4.7	195	241
Ballinameen					0.3	188	191
Ballyforan					3.3	172	200
Ballintober					1.5	137	147
Cootehall							184
Total						4964	5306

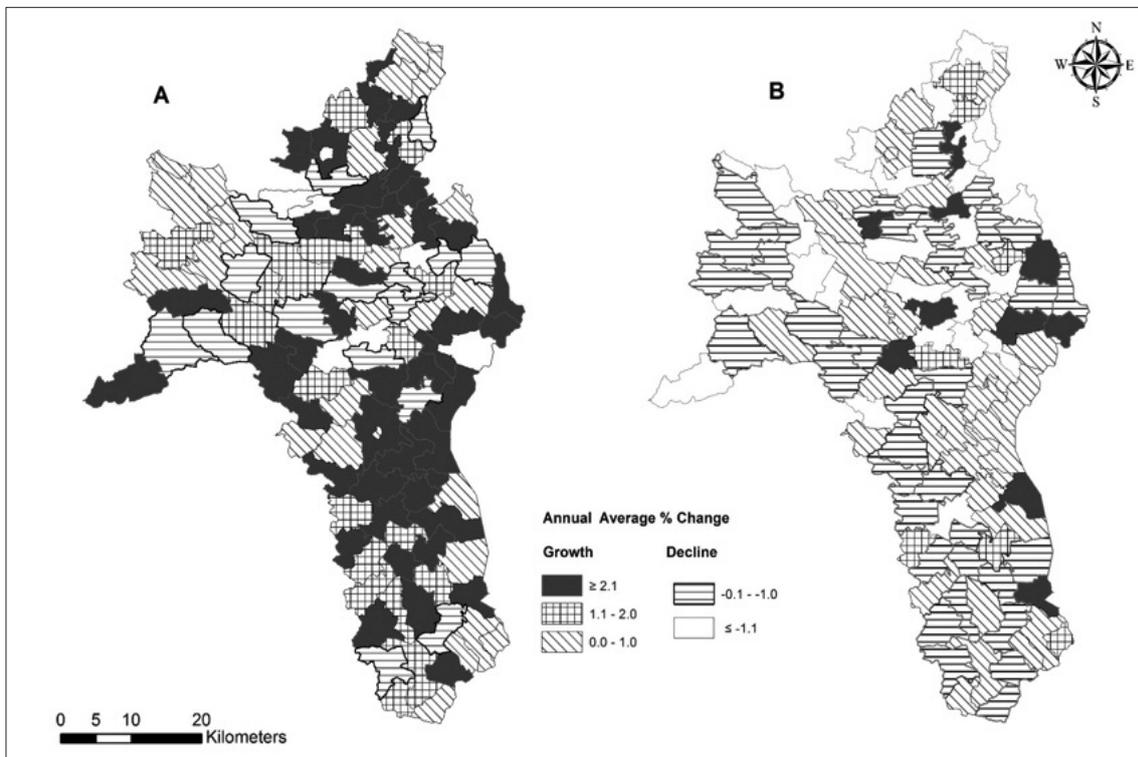
Sources: Census 2002, Table B0112; Census 2006, Table C0112; Census 2011, Table CD121; Census 2016, Table E2016 (www.cso.ie)

\*Note: The environs or parts of towns in County Roscommon, located primarily in another county, are no longer available in the census reports since Local Government Reform in 2014; hence the absence of information for 2011-2016

Crannagh, Drumlosh, Taghboy EDs), Roscommon town (Cloontuskert, Roscommon Rural, Roscommon Urban District), Strokestown and Termonbarry EDs, pointing to an association with urban centres where employment and services were available. Two EDs adjacent to Boyle (Keadew and Oakport) also registered growth, notably between 2002 and 2006. No ED registered decline during all census periods. However, ten experienced decline during four of the five census periods: Taghmaconnell, in the southwest; Altagowlan, Aughrim East, Ballyfarnan, Estersnow and Lough Allen, in the north of the county; Ballinlough and Fairymount, in the west near Castlerea; and Killukin, south of Tulsk.

Mapping change by ED for 2006-2011 and 2011-2016 provides further insights into the distribution of population change across the county during the years of recession and recovery. The pattern for 2006-2011 illustrates a number of features: (i) the influence of proximity to a town on population increase, seen in growth near Athlone, Roscommon and Boyle in particular before the full impacts of the recession became apparent; (ii) the impact of the rural renewal measures in attracting population to small towns and villages along the River Shannon; (iii) decline in population in districts which adjoined areas of growth, pointing to localised factors being at work which require investigation on the ground to explain fully (Fig. 2A). Examples of EDs in the latter case are Breedogue, Estersnow, Fairymount, Frenchpark and Rushfield south and southwest of Boyle; Ballinlough and Coolougher between Clonfad and Castlerea; Castleplunkett, Carrowduff, Killukin, Kilbride North between Castlerea and Roscommon town; Creeve and Elia east of Elphin; Kilglass North near Roosky; and Creagh and Thomastown between Ballinasloe and Athlone (Fig. 2A).

Population growth had slowed in the county by 2011-2016, as out migration increased, and more EDs were registering decline. The moderation in rates of growth is particularly apparent in the environs of Athlone, Carrick-on-Shannon and Roscommon town where rates had been high in 2006-2011 (Fig. 2B). Average annual population decline in excess of 1.0% had become more widespread particularly north and west of Roscommon town. Examples of EDs where the trend changed from average annual growth in excess of 2.0% to losses of -1.1% or greater include Ballyfarnan and Crossna in the north of the county and Kiltullagh in the west. These changes serve to underline the fluidity of population change at ED level. Some of the implications of rural population decline are apparent in the number of primary schools that were eligible for special support assistance under the DEIS (delivering equality of opportunity in schools) scheme in 2017. Of eighteen rural schools that were eligible, all but one (Ballyforan) were located north of Roscommon town.<sup>80</sup> Two urban primary schools, in Ballaghaderreen and Castlerea respectively, were eligible also.



**Fig.31 2:** Annual average % population change by Electoral District: A, 2006-2011; B, 2011-2016. (Source: Central Statistics Office base map and Small Area Population Statistics).

## Conclusions

Between 1996 and 2016, County Roscommon became further integrated into economy and society internationally, through inward investment, exports (and imports) and migration. The pervasive impacts of recession in the late 2000s were still apparent in 2016. Employment fell and unemployment rose after 2008. The inclusion of the county in a rural renewal scheme in 1998 supported rapid expansion of the building and construction sector which was followed by rapid contraction. Unemployment remains a significant problem in the county. The population of the county grew only moderately between 1996 and 2016, because of increased out migration of young working age people in response to economic recession. However, during the years of growth, the population became more culturally diverse as labour migrants were attracted from a wide range of international sources. Asylum seekers and refugees were provided with temporary accommodation also. Residential related in migration from other Irish counties took place, particularly to the environs of Athlone and Carrick-on-Shannon and to villages along the River Shannon. Former emigrants to GB returned. In migration contributed to increasing birth rates which have helped to offset out migration of people of working age. The population became more concentrated in the environs of employment centres, notably Roscommon town, Athlone and Carrick-on-Shannon and decline took place in areas of open countryside, especially in western and northern areas. This latter feature presents particular challenges in meeting the service needs of both older and younger people which are being addressed through Leader and other initiatives.

Extensive areas of agricultural land in Roscommon contribute to a landscape of high quality but an emphasis on grazing livestock limits the average incomes received directly from farming. Farming is a subsidiary occupation on one-third of farms. Manufacturing (including agricultural processing), retail and wholesale activities are among the principal sources of male employment. The wholesale and retail trade is also an important source of female employment; however, females have become increasingly dependent on public sector employment in health and education and in other community, social and personal services.

Roscommon County Council advocates that the sources of employment should be diversified in the county and that further international investment in larger companies should be attracted.<sup>81</sup> Many small locally owned businesses exist whose employment is valued but there may be limits on the potential for expansion. There is increased dependence on employment in other counties, with more than one-third of the resident workforce commuting to work outside the county in 2016. A rich natural and cultural heritage provides opportunities for the further development of tourism but innovative strategies are required to offset seasonality so as to maximise full-time employment. Particular challenges relate to retaining highly qualified and highly skilled younger people who would help to develop both advanced technology and craft activities in the county.

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