

PLACE-BASED ECONOMIC INACTIVITY IN THE BROAD NORTH WEST BORDER REGIONS OF NORTHERN IRELAND & THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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14th Annual NERI Labour Market Conference

BIOs for Chair

- Aidan Campbell Bio
- Aidan took up post as Research Programme Development Manager in April 2024 and manages the research programme supporting the Centre's mission to strengthen cross-border cooperation. He is responsible for increasing CCBC research profile by commissioning and, when required, undertaking unique and relevant pieces of research. He has over twenty five years experience in community development work, policy and research.
- Niall O'Donnellan Bio
- Niall is a Senior Research Associate with the Centre. He is an independent strategy advisor/mentor and development economist. Niall has worked in a range of roles in economic development, including for over a decade on Enterprise Ireland's leadership team as Head of Regions and as Head Policy & Planning. He holds a Masters (Econ) from National University of Ireland, Galway, and a Masters in Online and Distance Learning from the Open University. Niall was Chair of IT Sligo (now part of Atlantic Technology University) from 2016-2022. He also has been a member of the SOLAS Board from 2023.



EPIC Futures NI Local Policy Innovation Partnership



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Purpose of the Research

- The research set out to examine Economic Inactivity in the Border region on the island of Ireland and to determine if the Border had any specific effects on rates and patterns of economic inactivity.
- People who are defined in Censuses as Economically Inactive (EAI) are
 - retired (whether receiving a pension or not);
 - Studying fulltime in education and training ;
 - looking after home or family;
 - long-term sick or disabled; and
 - Other
- “Unemployed” people are not included (as they are economically active because they are seeking work).
- The five Northern Ireland local district councils that abut the border are Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, Derry City and Strabane, Fermanagh and Omagh, Mid-Ulster and Newry, Mourne and Down. The six Republic of Ireland County Councils that abut the Border are Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Monaghan, Cavan and Louth.

Methodology

- **Constraints, strategy and policy review** of relevant literature and policy,
- **Data review and analysis** primarily using data from the NISRA and CSO Censuses of Population (NI 2021 and 2011, and ROI 2022 and 2011)

(NB: In some cases only “side by side” comparisons are possible, due to data comparability issues)

- **Data review at small/local area level**, using NISRA Census 2021 and CSO Census 2022 data sources
- **Ethics Approval**, from Ulster University
- **Contextual Interviews** with stakeholders and experts n. 15
- **Qualitative Interviews**, with “Activation actors” and employers across a range of sizes and sectors n. 22
- **Interim findings workshop**
- The **focus of the research** has been on “**place**”
 - North Urban (NU) (Derry City and Strabane),
 - North Rural (NR) Fermanagh and Omagh,
 - South Urban (SU) (Donegal(Letterkenny+)) and
 - South Rural (SR) (Sligo/Leitrim),

Macro Quantitative Results

- **Economic Inactivity** Rates of Economic Inactivity in the Border regions do not diverge much from jurisdiction rates when looking at Local Government District Level data.
- **A Border Effect?** Not seeing any evidence to support the idea of “Border effect” on Economic Inactivity rates.
- **People with long-term health conditions/disabilities** Overall, people in NI with disabilities and limited at all or a lot were 24% and 11% of adult population respectively. Overall, people in RoI with disability to any or great extent were 22% and 8% of adult population respectively.
- Making “side-by-side “comparisons and comments between NI and RoI is especially challenging in relation to shares of different long-term health conditions and disabilities BUT
- Very similar shares of total conditions reported between the Border regions and the Total jurisdictions, so again, there is no “Border effect” that shows higher or lower frequency of specific health conditions in the Border regions compared to the Total Jurisdictions
- Issues related to mental health represent about 30% of long-term health conditions overall in both jurisdictions.
- **Those Looking after Home/Family**
- **Retired**
- **Business size** in both jurisdictions, micro-enterprises and smaller businesses (engaging under 20 people) are significant local employers and central to access to paid employment for the economically inactive
- **Sectoral structure** is similar on both sides of the Border region, with greater shares of agriculture etc, manufacturing, construction and Wholesale/Retail, and lesser shares of information and communication, finance, professional etc services and administrative services than their overall respective jurisdiction.

Summary of Overall and Border Economically Inactive in NI and ROI

Economically Inactive Totals '000 and as % of Adult Population (NI 16 years + and ROI 15 years +)

Economically Inactive	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
2021/2022		
Overall Jurisdiction '000 (% of Adult Pop.)	623,711 (41%)	1,605,753 (39%)
Border Region '000 (% of Adult Pop.)	257,745 (40%)	181,378 (41%)
2011		
Overall Jurisdiction '000 (% of Adult Pop.)	557,694 (39%)	1,376,459 (38%)
Border Region '000 (% of Adult Pop.)	232,749 (39%)	158,696 (40%)
2022/21/2011 Change		
Overall Jurisdiction '000 Change (% of Change)	+ 66,017 (+12%)	+ 229,294 (+ 17%)
Border Region '000 Change (% of Change)	+ 24,996 (+11%)	+ 22,682 (+14%)

Sources: NI 2011 MS-H02a NI 2021 CT0581NI and ROI Principal Economic Status ROI Census 2022 Profile 7 F7010 2011-2022 CSO

NI and RoI Total and Borders Comparison of Change in Composition of Economic Inactive 2011/2021/2 ('000 and %)

NI and RoI Total and Borders Comparison of Change in Composition of Economic Inactive 2011/2021/2 ('000 and %)						
	Total Economically Inactive	Student	Retired	Looking after family/home	Long-term sick/disabled	Other
NI						
Total LGDs	+ 66,000 (102%)	-800 (-0.1%)	+31,000 (47%)	+ 18,000 (27%)	+ 13,000 (20%)	+ 5,000 (8%)
Border LGDs	+25,000 (98%)	-3,000 (-12%)	+15,000 (60%)	+8,000 (32%)	+ 3,000 (12%)	+ 1,400 (6%)
RoI						
Total CoCos	+ 229,000 (99%)	+50,000 (22%)	+ 200,000 (87%)	-68,000 (-30%)	+ 32,000 (14%)	+ 14,000 (6%)
Border CoCos	+23,000 (100%)	+4,600 (20%)	+ 23,000 (101%)	-8,600 (-37%)	+ 2,300 (10%)	+ 1,500 (6%)

Data analysis at local level

- At small area level, there is considerable variation in the rates of economic inactivity, with ranges of 34% to 64% in small areas in NI Rural North West Border region and 31% to 43% in RoI Rural North West Border region. Also significant variation in NW Urban Border Region, within small areas in Derry City ranging 42-52% and Letterkenny 38%.
- Future research exploring the reasons behind such wide variation at small area level would be useful but outside the scope of this study.
- Unsurprisingly, travel to work areas are somewhat larger in the rural communities considered
- The research also looked at public transport availability for the purposes of accessing work from the selected settlements for people who don't have access to a car. This is of particular relevance for younger people and disabled people and others with long term conditions who may not have access to a car.
- All of the specific insights are suggestive of a link - for smaller settlements at least - between the use of public transport and the level of economic inactivity, yet needs much more statistically and related analysis before drawing clear conclusions.

Fermanagh/Omagh DC Rural Settlements Economic Inactivity Rate, Distance & Method of Travel to Work

Settlement	Data zone/ Super data zone	Total Population	Economic Inactivity rate	Work mainly at or from home	No fixed place	less than 5km	5km to 20km	Distance to place of work ≤ 20km (incl. wfh & no fixed place)	Driving a car/van	Passenger in a car/van	Walking/ cycling	bus/train
Ballinamallard	Erne North E	1364	40%	13%	10%	16%	47%	86%	75%	3%	6%	<1%
Dromore (FODC)	West Tyrone G1	319	34%	12%	14%	9%	36%	71%	84%	<1%	<1%	<1%
	West Tyrone G2	287	60%	5%	26%	23%	29%	83%	70%	11%	11%	1%
	West Tyrone G3	350	51%	16%	17%	20%	25%	78%	72%	5%	7%	<1%
Fintona	West Tyrone D1	362	64%	8%	9%	24%	43%	84%	65%	9%	11%	3%
	West Tyrone D2	552	46%	16%	16%	17%	32%	81%	67%	5%	6%	3%
	West Tyrone D3	303	55%	14%	15%	13%	44%	86%	64%	9%	9%	2%
Irvinestown	Erne North D	2325	46%	13%	12%	22%	36%	83%	71%	6%	8%	<1%
Kesh	Erne North A3	516	54%	7%	18%	22%	24%	71%	72%	4%	13%	3%
	Erne North A4	576	35%	16%	16%	13%	28%	73%	79%	2%	2%	<1%
Lisbellaw	Enniskillen G3	455	42%	20%	18%	6%	43%	87%	71%	5%	3%	<1%
	Enniskillen G5	485	41%	15%	11%	7%	57%	90%	77%	2%	3%	2%
Lisnaskea	Erne East D	3,020	47%	12%	13%	30%	30%	85%	68%	7%	10%	<1%
Maguiresbridge	Erne East C2	462	38%	13%	12%	17%	48%	90%	74%	7%	2%	<1%
	Erne East C3	478	40%	10%	13%	15%	50%	88%	81%	4%	2%	3%
FODC Area		116,812	42%	16%	13%	25%	26%	80%	70	4%	6%	<1%

Source: Census 2021 Area Explorer NISRA

Public Transport Times from FODC small Settlements to Omagh/Enniskillen

Settlement	Data zone/Super data zone	Population	Economic Inactivity rate	% travel to work bus/train	AM Bus to Omagh	PM bus from Omagh	Travel time to Omagh AM	AM Bus to Enniskillen	Travel time to Enniskillen AM	PM bus from Enniskillen
Ballinamallard	Erne North E	1364	40%	<1%	740	1745	45	820	20	1725/1750
Dromore (FODC)	West Tyrone G1	319	34%	<1%	0729/0802	1812	23	746	53	1725
	West Tyrone G2	287	60%	1%	0729/0803	1812	23	746	53	1725
	West Tyrone G3	350	51%	<1%	0729/0804	1812	23	746	53	1725
Fintona	West Tyrone D1	362	64%	3%	0715/0815	1730	19	n/a	n/a	n/a
	West Tyrone D2	552	46%	3%	0715/0815	1730	19	n/a	n/a	n/a
	West Tyrone D3	303	55%	2%	0715/0815	1730	19	n/a	n/a	n/a
Irvinestown	Erne North D	2325	46%	<1%	n/a	n/a	n/a	805	31	1635/1750
Kesh	Erne North A3	516	54%	3%	n/a	n/a	n/a	751	48	1635/1750
	Erne North A4	576	35%	<1%	n/a	n/a	n/a	751	48	1635/1751
Lisbellaw	Enniskillen G3	455	42%	<1%	n/a	n/a	n/a	827	10	1710/1745
	Enniskillen G5	485	41%	2%	n/a	n/a	n/a	827	10	1710/1745
Lisnaskea	Erne East D	3,020	47%	<1%	n/a	n/a	n/a	814	23	1710/1745
Maguiresbridge	Erne East C2	462	38%	<1%	n/a	n/a	n/a	819	18	1710/1745
	Erne East C3	478	40%	3%	n/a	n/a	n/a	819	18	1710/1746

Source: Translink Journey Planner

Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal Counties: Settlements Economic Inactivity Rate & Public Transport Times 1

Settlement	Population	Economic Inactivity rate	% Travel to work and study by Bus/train	AM by bus/train to Sligo (or *Derry/Londonderry)	PM by bus/train to Sligo, (or Derry/Londonderry)	Sample Travel Times	Bus routes
Carrick-on-Shannon (Co Leitrim)	4743	37%	4%	N/A			
Manorhamilton (Co Leitrim)	1667	42%	3%	7.55	17.47	37 mins	458
Ballymote (Co. Sligo)	1711	41%	5%	7.45	17.20	36 mins	977
Collooney (Co. Sligo)	1797	33%	6%	7.06/7.49/8.09	17.05 **	19 mins	981/462 Train Dep
Ballysadare (Co. Sligo)	1747	31%	7%	7.16/7.40/8.00	17.18	21min	981/458/462
Strandhill (Co. Sligo)	1982	36%	5%	5.59/6.39/7.09/7.39/8.10	17.20	21 min	S2
Tubbercurry (Co. Sligo)	2307	40%	6%	7.55	18.10	30mins	64/964/476
Sligo (Co. Sligo)	20,608	43%	4%	N/A			
Letterkenny (Co. Donegal)	22,549	38%	8%	6.35/8.10	17.15	40mins	64

Travel to Work/Study: Different Female/Male and Urban/Rural experiences

NI – Distance Travel to Work 20 KM or more/no fixed place of work	Females	Males
Fermanagh Omagh District Council	20%	33%
Derry City Strabane District Council	15%	28%
ROI – Time Travel to Work/Study 30 Minutes or more		
Sligo CoCo	33%	41%
Leitrim CoCo	42%	53%
Letterkenny Town	24%	36%

Source: Censuses NISRA 2021 and CSO 2022

Qualitative Interviews Findings 1

- A range of related issues are facing all employers as such in all areas north and south re. recruitment of staff
- Smaller enterprises tended to have greater flexibility and speed of response and larger organisations have greater capacity and systems, in terms of recruitment of workers who were further from the labour market.
- Many employers raised questions about perceived additional responsibilities and risks in relation to ensuring reasonable adjustments are implemented.
- Co-workers, while generally open and supportive, may want to understand roles and responsibilities as they start working with people with long-term health conditions.
- This points to the need to develop a more proactive campaign to address the questions and concerns of employers and fellow workers, building on the programmes already in place.

Qualitative Interviews Findings 2

- Employment coaches and other activation actors play a pivotal role in supporting people to return to work and helping employers understand both the opportunity and challenges.
- Their role is key in placing disabled people in employment but also supporting both new employees and the employer to manage the transition, manage reasonable adjustment and difficult conversations re. managing expectations on both sides when the person has taken on the role.
- The role of managers, supervisors and team members is critical in on-boarding new staff as well as coaching and having understanding attitudes to new co-workers. In many cases only relatively minor accommodations are required in terms of reasonable adjustments.
- Blocks to entry/re-entry by those economically inactive especially for women include perceived minimal incentive to work if wages are low, extra costs involved, and the risk of loss of benefits as well as availability and affordability of childcare.
- Access to public transport is also seen as major challenge. Such challenges can also inhibit women especially in taking up roles with additional time or greater responsibilities (under-employment).

Qualitative Interviews Findings 3

SUMMARY OF EMPLOYERS QUESTIONS

- What is involved in Reasonable Adjustment? What are the obligations and costs?
- What happens if there is a “normal” HR issue including letting people go?
- What will impact be on fellow-workers? What will their reaction be?
- What do supervisors have to do to support/coach newcomers? Are there extra/different ways of managing that have to be trained up for? Are there extra time and staffing costs involved?
- How or do we need to engage with families etc. ?
- Is the engagement in line with company policy, employer guidelines and jurisdiction legislation?
- Does such responsiveness add to rising employer costs (wages, social insurance contributions etc)

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Conclusion

- Enterprises and organisations of all sizes and sectors are open to hiring people with long-term health conditions and other economically inactive people.
- Smaller enterprises can often show a degree of greater flexibility and responsiveness, while larger organisations have more resources, systems and experience in providing support.
- However, many employers do have questions and concerns about perceived additional responsibilities and risks in relation to ensuring reasonable adjustments are implemented. This also applies to co-workers
- Employment coaches and other activation actors play a pivotal role in supporting people to return to work and helping employers understand both the opportunity and challenges.
- The role of managers, supervisors and team members is critical in making allowances and on-boarding new staff as well as coaching and having understanding attitudes to new co-workers.
- There are systemic blocks to entry/re-entry by those economically inactive that need to be addressed by wider policy.
- In terms of a major “Border Effect”, there is little or no evidence that economic inactivity in general and disability rates in particular differs between the respective Border Region and the Overall Jurisdiction, in either Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- There are complexities that cross border workers must negotiate in relation to tax and social security. This can be identified as a “soft” border effect on the issue of economic inactivity.

BALANCE OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND WITHIN LABOUR MARKET AND WORLD OF WORK/CONTRIBUTION

LABOUR SUPPLY Range of ages, genders, origins, levels of education, etc

Churn of staff transfers

New entrants /school leavers

New entrants/immigrants

From other sectors within region/beyond region

Returning emigrants to region

Older age worker extending at work time

Unemployed (longterm, shortterm) Underemployed /parttime

Low working incomes/social benefits – poverty as constraint on supply of skills and capabilities

Existing staff – mental and/or physical health improvements

Carers for children or elderly or ill or family and home EIA

Retired EIA

People with longer-term physical and/or mental health challenges EIA

Students who are also working/could be working EIA

80% of employees and leaders report that they lack sufficient time or energy to do their work (Microsoft Work Trend Index25)

Decline in concentration, reading and writing capabilities due to digital immersion over past decade or more

How can system evolves to minimise loss of productive time and build integrated pathways to work?

LABOUR DEMAND Enterprises (Large, Medium, Small, and Smaller/Micros/Self-employed), Public, Community, Individual Participants

Regular staff vacancies and churn (560k to 2030)

Gaps and shortages in key sectors (eg construction 80k? etc.) and key skills (eg chefs, AI architects etc.)

Large projects /FDI and Irish Origin coming into and/or expanding with the region

Gaps in key skills of existing staff, Sector-specific(eg script-writer)

Gaps in key skills of existing staff, Horizontal (Eg AI) OR Foundational (e.g. literacy etc.) OR Expressive (eg Digital Creative) OR Participation (e.g. Mentoring Leadership etc

4th Industrial Revolution (Structural) – Digital AI+, Sustainable Green, Human Higher Capability

- Risk of Much less routine professional, administrative etc. jobs, especially challenging for first time labour market entrants (follows what happened in Agriculture and Industry) and/or Opportunity of Stepchange in Productivity and (a la Keynes) Free Human Time

Sectoral and Other Crisis Transfers (Transitional): Coal mines to Greentech

“Good Jobs” – tradeoffs between income, security, supervision and creativity

Shifts in structure of employment re incomes, skills etc

THANK YOU!
GO RAIBH MAITH AGAT!
MUCKLE THANKS!

