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**ANALYSIS OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL
AND CULTURAL PROFILE OF COUNTY
ROSCOMMON**

Prepared for

ROSCOMMON COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

By

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NIRSA



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Ollscoil na hÉireann M4 Nuad



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We hope that the report will be of assistance to all organisations and individuals with an interest in the future development of County Roscommon.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment of the current situation in County Roscommon in relation to economic, social and cultural development in order to assist the County Development Board in the preparation of its 10 to 15 years strategy. The content of the report takes account of the DOELG (Department of Environment and Local Government) Guidelines document, *A Shared Vision for County/City Development Boards*.

Comparative data for neighbouring counties are provided where appropriate and detailed mapping has been undertaken to illustrate patterns within the county wherever data have been available. Much of the mapping is based on data from the 1996 Census of Population, which is undoubtedly a limitation. However, there are no more recent data available at sub-county level for most indicators. Where appropriate county level data for more recent years have been used; otherwise comments have been inserted on the most likely direction of change since 1996.

County Roscommon ([Map 1](#)). occupies an area of 254,819 hectares with a total population of almost 52,000 persons in 1996. Topographically most of the county is flat to undulating with most areas between 60 and 100 metres above sea level. The boundary to the east is provided by the river Shannon which is surrounded in parts by very low lying land that is subject to flooding. The agricultural potential of the land in the east and parts of the north of the county is very limited due to poor drainage and a high proportion of organic soils. By contrast, conditions are much more favorable on the shallow soils that are found in the central and southern parts of the county.

The geographical position of Roscommon is an important contextual factor in any assessment of recent development trends and future prospects. While part of the West Regional Authority Area the county has much in common with neighboring counties that are parts of the Midland region. In many respects County Roscommon might be best described as an inland periphery.

The north of the county is crossed by the N5 while the N6 extends across the southern edge from Athlone to Ballinasloe ([Map 1](#)). The principal town, Roscommon, is the hub of a radial network of National Secondary roads. Another striking feature is that many of the urban centres that have a role in the economic and social development of the county are located either on or beyond the boundary, such as Athlone, Longford, Carrick-on-Shannon and Ballinasloe.

There are three rail lines that pass through county Roscommon. The Dublin Hueston to Westport line, Dublin Heuston to Galway line and the Dublin Connolly to Sligo line. The Westport to Dublin Route is currently being upgraded. A total of IR£30million (€38.1million) will be spent on laying 30 miles (48km) of track. This is part of the ongoing investment in the route that will see the completion of the upgrade in 2003.

([Map 8](#)) also exhibits the main towns and villages in the County. Roscommon is the principal town with a population of just under 4,000 at the 1996 census. Boyle and Castlerea are each about half this size with Ballaghaderreen having a population of just over 1200 at the 1996 census.

Towns of these sizes do not have the critical mass to be self-sustaining generators of high value-added economic activity. They lack the inherent capacity to sustain such developments. This is of course not to suggest that appropriately scaled economic activity cannot thrive within the county but the county will not be able to generate sufficient activity to provide full employment for its potential workforce.

The influence of Athlone with a population now probably around 20,000 is substantial, especially on the southern half of the county. The future well being of the county is inevitably tied to the development of Athlone.

The provision of supports for different aspects of the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions of development is undertaken by a very large number of agencies. While many of these operate either across the entire county or in certain parts of it there are a number of services that are organized on a regional basis. These include supports for enterprise development, tourism, labour force training, health care, waste management, security, etc. Unfortunately, the boundaries of the service providers do not always coincide, with Roscommon being included with different groupings of counties for different services ([Maps 2,3,4,5](#)). This administrative situation is not particularly well suited to facilitating the development of a coordinated approach to the delivery of public services.

In County Roscommon there are 6 electoral areas ([Map 6](#)). An important challenge for the County Development Board is to secure broadly based support for a countywide strategy bearing in mind the geography of local representation.

A starting point in our review is to determine the relative position of Roscommon in relation to economic development and living standards. **Table 1** provides some of the key comparative indicators for Roscommon and other midland counties together with the corresponding indicators for the country as a whole and the West region.

Table 1: Income indices

	<i>GVA per capita 1995</i>	<i>Disposable Income Per capita 1998</i>	<i>Percent of population covered by medical cards, September 2000</i>
<i>Roscommon</i>	55	86.3	39.8
<i>Laois</i>	64	88.3	34.6
<i>Westmeath</i>	87	95.3	33.1
<i>Longford</i>	76	89.9	42.6
<i>Midlands</i>	75	89.7	35.4
<i>West</i>	73	93.1	39.6
<i>Ireland</i>	100	100.0	30.6

Gross Value Added *GVA per capita* is a comparable indicator to *GDP per capita* widely used as an indicator of national economic performance. *GVA per capita* measures the output of goods and services, measured in money terms, which is produced within the county in a given period (usually a year), regardless of the county or country which supplies the resources (that is, labour and capita) to produce this output. It suffers from the same defect of the GDP measure in that it does not take account of profit repatriations of multi-national corporations (MNCs). But at county level it suffers from arguably a more serious handicap. To the extent that residents of Roscommon earn their livelihoods outside of the county and *vice versa*, *GVA* is also a deficient measure of economic activity in that it only records the wages etc. associated with the economic activity irrespective of where the workers reside. It therefore gives a very misleading indicator of the living standards of the inhabitants of the county. However, what it does reveal is the relative strength of the industrial base and hence the relative capacity of the Local Authority to fund local services from its rates' base.

On this indicator Roscommon is seen to lag behind its midland neighbours, especially Westmeath, given the influence of Athlone. *GVA per capita* is seen to be 45% below the country as a whole and 18% below the West region.

Per capita disposable income (also **Table 1**) reveals a somewhat different picture because this indicator of living standards is more comprehensive than *GVA* in that it captures the full income sources of all residents (including social-welfare-type income) and the progressive impact of the tax system. Nevertheless in comparative terms Roscommon is seen to be about 14 percentage points below the national average and to lag its midland neighbours by significant levels.

The challenge confronting the county is clearly to significantly raise both of these indicators over the period of the Plan. Realistically, as we have hinted at above and as the profile will reveal further below, it is probably easier to enhance its disposable income ranking than its *GVA* ranking.

Another index of living standards is the percentage of the population covered by medical cards, which was nearly 40% in September 2000 comparable to the figure for the West region but much higher than the figure of about 31% for all counties (**Table 1**).

The remainder of the Profile is laid out as follows. Recent trends in demography and the labour force will be considered in the next two sections, after which there is a more detailed analysis of the economy. The following section examines the social context for development in County Roscommon. Section 6 covers a number of topics under the general heading of Quality of Life. This is followed by a discussion of the current situation in relation to a number of different forms of supporting infrastructure. Section 8 provides a synthesis by way of a summary rural typology map, which situates the analysis in a wider reference frame that has been prepared for the National Spatial Strategy. Finally, a number of emerging issues are identified and suggestions are provided for a framework that might assist in devising the CDB strategy.

The analysis throughout is accompanied by maps compiled at the level of District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) which are shown on ([Map 7](#)). The total county population in 1996 was about 52,000 persons, of which only 20% were resident in urban areas.

Population density levels vary a good deal ([Map 9](#)) from the very rural areas in the northwest and west (less than 11 persons per square kilometre in 28 of the 112 DEDs) to more than 57.7 in the southern districts dominated by the influence of Athlone. The overall density for the County is only 20.4 persons per square kilometre compared to 52 for the state, reflecting the predominantly rural nature of much of the county.

Almost all (98%) of the population resided in private households for which the average size was 3.09 persons compared with an average of 3.14 for the State. The largest households are mostly in the rural areas in the south but the greatest concentrations of smaller households are also in rural areas in the northwest and west ([Map 10](#)).

Between 1991-96 the total **population increased** by 78 (0.2%) compared to an increase of 2.8% for the State. Significant growth (up to 27%) has only occurred in 4 DEDs dominated by the towns of Athlone and Boyle, and Shannonbridge in the extreme south of the county, while more moderate growth has occurred in the contiguous DEDs and in the DEDs around Roscommon town ([Map 11](#)). However, the salient feature of the map is the substantial decline in population in 76 of the 112 DEDs.

The populations of the main towns and the changes since 1986 are shown in **Table 2**. The absolutely small size of Roscommon towns and settlements, even when aggregated, is a limitation that affects the volume of commercial and retail activity in the county and its attractiveness to large-scale inward investment. On the other hand the county is positioned within a potential corridor bounded by Athlone in the Southeast and Sligo in the Northwest. Both of these towns are of a scale that could with appropriate public investment be subsidiary growth gateways to larger urban centres.

Table 2: Population of principal towns and changes since 1986

	Total 1996	Change 1986-91	Change 1991-96	Change 1986-96
Roscommon	3915	-46	488	442
Boyle	2122	-186	25	-161
Castlerea	1790	-18	-32	-50
Ballaghderreen	1248	-106	-22	-128
Strokestown	572	-52	4	-48
Elphin	545	12	20	32
Athlone	15544	-213	186	-27
Ballinasloe	5723	-335	-169	-504
Carrick-on-Shannon	1868	237	10	247
Sligo	18509	-54	545	501

Net migration movements are a major influence on the distribution of population change. The cohort aged 10-19 years (1986) declined substantially in all DEDs bar one (Athlone) over the 10 years. ([Map 12](#)). The largest declines (dark blue areas) were recorded for the most rural DEDs in the North and Northwest. ([Map 13](#)) shows the experience for the cohort aged 20-29 years in 1986.

The **age profile** of the DEDs in the County are the outcome of these longer-term population shifts (see **Table 3, 3a and Maps 14,15,16,17,18**). The main contrasts are between, on the one hand, the DEDs south of Roscommon town which have above average concentrations in the principal family formation age groups (25-24 years) and, on the other hand, the more remote rural parts in the Northwest.

Table 3: Age profile and dependency ratios, 1996

	<i>Laois</i>	<i>Westmeath</i>	<i>Longford</i>	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
% aged < 15	25.7	24.9	24.9	23.7	23.7
% aged 15-24	15.8	17.5	16.0	14.7	17.5
% aged 25-44	27.8	27.0	25.1	24.8	28.0
% aged 45-64	18.6	18.8	20.2	20.3	19.4
% aged 65 +	12.1	11.8	13.8	16.5	19.4
Youth dependency	41.4	39.2	40.6	39.6	36.5
Elderly dependency	19.4	18.5	22.5	27.5	17.6
Vitality ratio	227.2	237.2	177.8	143.0	258.3

Table 3a: Age profile and Dependency ratios, West, 1996

	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
% aged < 15	23.7	23.9	23.7
% aged 15-24	14.7	16.8	17.5
% aged 25-44	24.8	25.7	28.0
% aged 45-64	20.3	19.5	19.4
% aged 65 +	16.5	14.0	19.4
Youth dependency	39.6	38.6	36.5
Elderly dependency	27.5	22.5	17.6
Vitality ratio	143.0	189.5	258.3

The effect of these contrasts in age profiles is more sharply revealed by examining the so-called **dependency ratios** (Table 3, 3a and Map 19 and 20). The youth dependency ratios are reasonably well distributed throughout the county (Map 19) while the elderly dependency ratio (Map 20) displays a very pronounced contrast between the south and northwest of the county.

Map 21 (see also Table 3, 3a) gives a forward-looking measure of the population dynamic in terms of an index of **demographic vitality** (Map 21) (persons aged 20-39 years in 1996 as a ratio of number of persons aged over 60), which clearly demonstrates the urban/rural and northwest/south contrast.

3. THE LABOUR FORCE

The labour force consists of the total at work, the number of unemployed persons and the number of first-time job seekers. In 1996 the total labour force in Roscommon was 20,534, of whom 90% were classified as “at work”. Demographic trends and participation rates influence changes in the size of the labour force. The situation in Roscommon is shown on [Map 22](#). The highest growth in the labour force has mainly occurred in the DEDs south of Roscommon town with a handful of districts in this area suffering declines in the labour force. The picture in the north of the county is one mainly of decline with growth only evident in the northwestern districts.

Participation rates, especially, of women but also workers that might have been previously under employed in, for instance, the agricultural sector, are crucial to enhancing the labour force and ultimately the **level of living** within the County. Indeed the primary reason why the Irish economy has grown so rapidly since 1994 has been the phenomenal growth in the labour force brought about mainly by the increase in the female participation rate. Increased participation of females can be accounted for by factors such as improved educational levels, removal of barriers preventing married women from working in some sectors, a lower marriage rate and declining average family size as well as the growth in economic activity, especially in the services area and for many couples both partners require to be earning to defray the costs of ever-increasing mortgages. At county level we can expect female participation rates to be affected by issues of rural transport and the availability of childcare facilities.

3.1 Participation rates

In Roscommon the overall participation rate was 51.8% in 1996 compared with 55.4% for the State. The overall rate is the outcome of combining an above average male participation rate and a female rate that is less than for the State (**Table 4 and 4a**).

Table 4: Labour force participation rates, 1996

	<i>Laois</i>	<i>Westmeath</i>	<i>Longford</i>	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
Male participation rate	70.7	69.6	69.7	69.0	70.7
Female participation rate	35.5	38.7	34.3	33.6	40.7

Table 4a: Labour force participation rates, west, 1996

	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
Male participation rate	69.0	62.2	70.7
Female participation rate	33.6	37.8	40.7

More up to date data would doubtless reveal a marked increase in the overall participation rate ([Map 23](#)) but it is unlikely that the main factor responsible for the within county variation in the total participation rate, namely, female participation rates ([Map 24](#)) will have changed dramatically in the interim.

The highest overall rates and the largest numbers of participants are in the southern districts reflecting the influence of Athlone. The lowest rates are mainly in rural areas in the northwest, principally due to lower female rates in these districts. The tendency for the highest female participation rates to be in the districts with high accessibility to employment opportunities has implications for future patterns as most of the overall gains in participation will come from higher female rates.

3.2 Sectoral employment patterns

The Sectoral distribution of employment is presented in Table 5 Agriculture, forestry and fishing accounted for just under 25% of the total at work in the county compared with 10.2% for the State in 1996. The much greater relative importance of the sector in the north and west and the rural areas in the south is shown on [Map 25](#). In most of these areas the very high reliance on agriculture (over 50% in 15 DEDs and over 33% in about 33 DEDs) is simply a reflection of the limited range of alternative employment opportunities. In contrast in the south eastern border of the County the share of the workforce in this sector is very low due to large numbers working in other sectors, although most of these workers it should be noted are unlikely to be residing in Roscommon.

Table 5: Number of persons at work classified by broad industrial sectors, 1996

	Males 1996	Females 1996	Total 1996	Males Change 1991-96	Females Change 1991-96	Total Change 1991-96
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	4181	348	4529	-979 (-23.4%)	-116 (-33.3%)	-1095 (-24.2%)
Mining, quarrying, turf production	266	11	277	18 (6.8%)	3 (27.3%)	21 (7.6%)
Manufacturing	1974	840	2814	338 (17.1%)	219 (26.1%)	557 (19.8%)
Electricity, gas and water supplies	202	26	228	-9 (-4.5%)	-2 (-7.7%)	-11 (-4.8%)
Building and construction	1429	51	1480	396 (27.7%)	10 (19.6%)	406 (27.4%)
Commerce, insurance, finance	1718	1206	2924	-118 (-6.9%)	123 (10.2%)	5 (0.2%)
Transport, communication, etc	605	175	780	96 (15.9%)	21 (12.0%)	117 (15.0%)
Public administration and defense	673	489	1162	26 (3.9%)	104 (21.3%)	130 (11.2%)
Professional services	968	2025	2993	84 (8.7%)	392 (19.4%)	476 (15.9%)
Other	585	787	1372	220 (37.6%)	240 (30.5%)	460 (33.5%)
Total	12601	5958	18559	72 (0.6%)	994 (16.7%)	1066 (5.7%)

Sources: Census 1996 – Principal Economic Status and Industries Tables: 13a, 13b, 13c.
Census 1991 – Industries Tables 8a, 8b, 8c.

Manufacturing industries in Roscommon account for about 15% of the total at work compared with the national share of 19.1%. Nearly 60% of DEDs enjoy a manufacturing employment share of 12% or over and it is apparent from [Map 26](#) that there is reasonable distribution of this activity around the County, with the exception of a cluster of DEDs immediately northwest of Roscommon.

The total service sector (which includes all activities that are not classified as either manufacturing or agriculture) accounts for about 52% of the workforce and some impressive employment gains are recorded for key sub sectors, for example, professional services. It is also noteworthy that females dominate the recorded employment increases, for example, they account for over 82% of the employment increase in professional services.

The distribution of "commerce, insurance, finance and business services" is presented on [Map 27](#) and the urban influence is clear, especially the impact of the expansion of Athlone. The county-wide distribution of workers in the professional services sector ([Map 28](#)) is evidently more concentrated

3.3 Unemployment

In 1996 there were 1781 unemployed persons and 214 first-time job seekers in the county amounting to 10% of the labour force. This rate will have declined significantly in the interim but the intra county pattern of unemployment is unlikely to have changed substantially since 1996 ([Map 29](#)). Large differences are apparent in unemployment rates between districts west of the Frenchpark - Roscommon axis and the majority of districts south of Roscommon town. Indeed 29 DEDs in 1996 could be said have enjoyed the status of full employment. The economic dependency ratio tells a largely similar story ([Map 30](#)).

4. THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE MAIN ECONOMIC SECTORS

This section furnishes indicators of the competitiveness of the three main sectors: agriculture, manufacturing and internationally traded services, including tourism.

4.1 Agriculture

Unfortunately we have only got detailed census information on a county basis for 1991 but this should nonetheless be adequate to provide a fairly robust impression of the contrasts within the county. **Table 6** gives an overview of the key structural features of the sector that have an intimate bearing on its competitiveness. Compared to the rest of Ireland the County Roscommon profile is unfavorable.

Table 6: Principal characteristics of agriculture 1991

	<i>Laois</i>	<i>Westmeath</i>	<i>Longford</i>	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
Avg. farm size (ha.)	30.8	28.8	22.0	20.0	26.0
Avg., farm size (ESUs)	14.4	10.3	7.3	5.7	11.6
% farmers aged >65	19.7	23.8	21.1	26.7	22.8
% farmers part-time	22.9	29.7	24.7	33.2	26.6
Marginal land % of total	52	21	37	58	49
Specialist tillage %	7.2	1.7	0.1	0.21	2.9
Specialist dairying %	21.5	13.8	16.9	6.30	24.4
Specialist beef production %	44.1	56.6	67.4	60.81	42.1
Specialist sheep %	3.3	4.8	2.0	8.42	8.8
Mixed grazing livestock %	15.1	20.7	12.1	24.01	17.9
Mixed crops & livestock %	7.7	1.5	0.3	0.26	2.5

The average farm size (measured in hectares) is below the national average and at about the level of Longford but significantly short of the average farm size in Laois and Westmeath ([Map 31](#)). Farm size measured in Economic Size Units (ESUs) takes account of the system of farming that is practiced and the level of productivity and is thus a preferable indicator of the income-generating capacity of the sector ([Map 32](#)). It is apparent that, on this index, Roscommon fares even more poorly and significantly lags the position for the State as a whole and its neighboring counties.

It is apparent that an area roughly north of Roscommon town is especially disadvantaged by the overall relatively small scale of farming activity, notwithstanding being punctuated by a few DEDs of relatively moderate size. Most of the DEDs south of Roscommon town have relatively large units with the exception of a handful of districts around Athlone. It is ironic that this area is also characterised by several other favorable indicators.

The extent of local specialisation in farm types is summarised on **Maps 33,34,35,36**. It is apparent that virtually all districts specialise in either cattle rearing, sheep rearing or mixed grazing systems ([Map 37](#)). These are low value-added enterprises and also highly subsidised sectors.

There have undoubtedly been many changes since then following the reforms of the CAP. The direction of agricultural policy is away from direct price supports and more towards direct payments to producers. More and more farm households within the county will become virtually totally reliant on these subsidies. In the long run this pattern of support is unlikely to be sustainable given that direct payments are subject to political determination. The inevitable pressure on the livelihoods of farm households will also create greater and greater demand for off-farm employment opportunities. But it is clear that accessibility to such opportunities is severely restricted in the northern part of the county in particular.

4.2 Manufacturing and Internationally Traded Services

A number of indicators of the competitiveness of the industrial sector in Roscommon, along with comparative data, are given in **Table 7 and 7a**. In terms of basic descriptive indicators such as the percentage of indigenous industry and the average numbers employed it is apparent that Roscommon is about at the national average. The county's sector also fairs reasonably well in terms of employment change. It is evident, however, that the county's share of its regional growth in employment is quite small, especially in contrast with Galway. It is evident that the county's sector also fairs poorly in terms of the more focused competitiveness indicators. The percentage of total employment that is accounted for by the "advanced sectors" is well below the national average but well ahead of Laois and Longford. The labour productivity of the sector as proxied by "GVA per manufacturing worker" is only 14% of the national average and this is reflected in the fact that nearly 50% of the sector's turnover is absorbed by the pay bill in contrast with only 17% nationally.

Table 7: Characteristics of Industrial activity

	<i>Laois</i>	<i>Westmeath</i>	<i>Longford</i>	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
No. of Industrial plants 1999	44	81	61	62	5474
Total employment in mfg. and Intl. Traded services 1999	1924	4748	2495	3376	324422
Net employment gain 1995-99 All firms	- 455	889	32	482	62524
Net employment gain 1995-99 Foreign-owned	- 638	486	- 438	257	39453
Net employment gain 1995-99 Irish-owned	193	393	470	225	23071
% employed in advanced sectors	9.1	35.8	12.6	35.9	44.9
Share of employment in five Largest firms	38	36	35	51	
GVA per person employed 1998 (Ireland = 100)	28.3	73.8	37.8	14	100.0
Wages and salaries as % of net output	47.2	36.4	37.3	56.6	16.9
Ratio of industrial to admin/ technical workers	10.0	7.0	8.5	3.2	4.5

Table 7a: Characteristics of Industrial activity for Western Counties

	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
No. of Industrial plants 1999	62	584	5474
Total employment in mfg. and intl. traded services 1999	3376	31049	324422
Net employment gain 1995-99 All firms	482	17058	62524
Net employment gain 1995-99 Foreign-owned	257	8435	39453
Net employment gain 1995-99 Irish-owned	225	8623	23071
% employed in advanced sectors	35.9	46.4	44.9
Share of employment in five Largest firms	51	N/A	N/A
GVA per person employed 1998 (Ireland = 100)	14	54	100.0
Wages and salaries as % of net output '98	56.6	24.3	16.9
Ratio of industrial to admin/ technical workers	5.3	3.2	2.6

The distribution of foreign-owned firms is influenced by many factors including the availability of suitable sites at accessible locations and the likelihood of being able to recruit and maintain a labour force with the requisite range of skills ([Map 38](#)).

Further expansion of the foreign-owned sector will be influenced by the availability of key infrastructures (transport, telecommunications, environmental and social) and labour forces with appropriate skills at strategic locations within the county. Competition will be aggressive with neighboring counties given the inherent strength of locations like Athlone and Sligo but counties like Cavan and Monaghan can also be expected to be competitive.

The Irish-owned manufacturing sector is extensive with almost approximately 35 companies assisted by Enterprise Ireland, there may be others that have not received assistance and are, therefore, not included in the Enterprise Ireland database.

The geographical distribution of Enterprise Ireland-supported companies is, as expected more dispersed than the pattern for foreign-owned companies. [Map 39](#) displays the number of companies by DED while further details are contained in **Table 7 and 7a**.

In accordance with government policy the County Enterprise Board (CEB) has responsibility for the development and support of micro enterprises, that is, enterprises which employ 10 or less. Where appropriate, particular aspects of micro enterprise support can be delivered by agreement through agencies such as Mid-South and Arigna LEADER companies, which already has experience in this area of activity. A notable feature of the projects assisted by local development agencies is that they are more likely to be widely dispersed away from the main urban centres. Thus they have a distinctive role in fostering small-scale rural based enterprises. Since 1993 the board has invested £2.3million in direct financial support and a further £1.2Million in management development. The success of the board can be measured in the local economy and by the creation of 403 full time jobs and 132 part time jobs.

4.2.1 Community Development/Community Forum

- There are 32 Community/family resource centres in the north of the county, 17 in the south of the county
- Type of groups in Community Fora- tidy towns, local development groups, heritage groups, tourism groups, community centres.
- Number of members of Community Fora - North Roscommon Community Forum - 53 and South Roscommon Community Forum - 80)
- Number of community groups - 328 in the county. Some of who are members of the Fora.

4.3 Services

As noted earlier, the services sector accounts for over 52% of the total at work in the County. It is also the sector in which most females are employed and the most rapidly growing. Unfortunately we do not have sufficiently detailed data to ascertain the relative competitiveness of this diverse sector. As already shown the distribution of service workers is very much influenced by access to urban centres. For internationally traded services there are different requirements such as the availability of a workforce with appropriate skills plus key infrastructure (especially for Information Communications Technology (ICT) based services) and attractive work environments at accessible locations. Unfortunately Roscommon lacks the capacity to be a significant player in this high value-added sector.

4.4 Tourism

In addition to urban-based services, tourism is also a major service industry, which can bring significant economic and social benefits to rural villages and small towns. County Roscommon has a large number of visitor activities including seven golf courses, a race track (Roscommon Town), well developed fisheries with good access for anglers, way-marked walking routes, Shannon cruise boat companies. It has a rich heritage with many burial grounds, megalithic tombs and ring forts. The royal burial site at Rathcroghan was home to the Kings of Connaught and later became home to the High Kings of Ireland. Roscommon has a number of Museums (the county Museum, the Strokestown House Famine Museum, The old School house Museum and The Roscommon heritage and Genealogical Centre) and historical homes including Frybrook house on the River Boyle and King house, Boyle both dating from the 18th Century. The County has a long standing and lasting association with traditional Irish Music and holds festivals through out the summer including the Douglas Hyde School of Irish Music in early July. ([Map 40](#)).

5. THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

This part examines the structure of society in County Roscommon. It commences with an overview of levels of educational attainment in the population as education is widely regarded as a critical agent in both social and economic transformation. This will be followed by an outline of the links between education and status in the labour force, and the geography of social stratification in the county. This will lead to a consideration of a number of aspects of social exclusion.

5.1 Education

The central role of education in social and economic transformation of Ireland over the past decade is well documented. Formal second level education is provided in Co. Roscommon through secondary schools at 10 locations that had a combined enrolment of 3275 ([Map 41](#)).

While Co. Roscommon does not have a Third Level College there are Institutes of Technology (IT) in Sligo and Athlone, Castlebar, Mountbellew and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, which provide a wide range of programmes extending from, certificate and diploma level to degree and postgraduate degree level. These courses cater for a wide range of disciplines in the sciences, humanities and business.

The census of population provides information on the highest level of formal education attained by all persons aged over 15 years. The distribution of the population according to **educational attainment levels** is summarized in **Table 8 and 8a which** also contains comparative data for neighboring counties, the State and the West Region. The most striking feature is that, with the exception of 3rd level degree level education or higher, there is a relatively similar level of educational attainment across the counties. The influence of Athlone IT on participation at third level is however apparent with Roscommon's participation level about four percentage points adrift of the national average.

The geographical distribution of persons with different levels of education is clearly influenced by many of the other variables that have been examined. The contrast between the more youthful population in the more accessible parts of the county and the rural parts in the west and northwest is clearly illustrated on [Map 42](#) and [Map 43](#).

Table 8: Percentage distribution of population aged 15 years and over by highest level of education completed 1996

	<i>Laois</i>	<i>Westmeath</i>	<i>Longford</i>	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
Primary	32%	30%	38%	34%	29%
Lower Secondary	23%	21%	19%	20%	20%
Upper Secondary	30%	30%	28%	30%	29%
3rd level - non degree	7%	9%	7%	8%	9%
3rd level - degree/higher	6%	8%	6%	6%	10%
Not Stated	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 8a: Percentage distribution of population aged 15 years and over by highest level of education completed, West, 1996

	Roscommon	West	Ireland
Primary	34%	34%	29%
Lower Secondary	20%	18%	20%
Upper Secondary	30%	28%	29%
Third level - non degree	8%	9%	9%
Third level - degree or higher	6%	9%	10%
Not Stated	2%	3%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

5.2 Social Classes

Educational attainment levels have a strong influence on occupational choices, which together with information on status in the labour force (employed versus unemployed), largely determines the **social class** to which individuals are assigned by the Central Statistics Office (**Table 9**).

In Roscommon 21% of the population are classified as belonging to either social classes 5 (semi-skilled) or 6 (unskilled workers) which is similar to the percentage in these groupings for the State. These social groups are very strongly represented in the rural parts of the county especially in the North and West ([Map 44](#) and [Map 45](#)). Social class 4 comprised of skilled manual workers is 21%.

Table 9: Percentage distribution of population by social classes, 1996

	Laois	Westmeath	Longford	Roscommon	Ireland
1. Professional workers	4%	5%	4%	3%	5%
2. Managerial and technical	21%	21%	20%	21%	22%
3. Non-manual workers	19%	21%	18%	21%	18%
4. Skilled manual Workers	22%	19%	23%	21%	20%
5. Semi-skilled manual Workers	13%	12%	13%	13%	13%
6. Unskilled Workers	10%	9%	9%	8%	9%
7. Others	10%	13%	13%	13%	12%
8. Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 9a: Percentage distribution of population by social classes, west, 1996

	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
1. Professional workers	3%	4%	5%
2. Managerial and technical	21%	21%	22%
3. Non-manual workers	21%	18%	18%
4. Skilled manual Workers	21%	21%	20%
5. Semi-skilled manual Workers	13%	13%	13%
6. Unskilled Workers	8%	8%	9%
7. Others	13%	14%	12%
8. Total	100%	100%	100%

5.3 Social Inclusion

The promotion of a more inclusive society is a key objective of development strategies for the future as laid out in the National Development Plan. Social inclusion is essentially about full participation in society.

While there is broad agreement on the objective there are difficulties when it comes to measuring the extent of social exclusion. Due to the very significant data limitations it is necessary to rely on a number of rough proxy variables to identify the distributions of groups that may be at risk of experiencing some form of social exclusion. The approach taken here is to consider a number of indicators that may reasonably be considered to be related to the experience of social exclusion. It is important to note that all persons described under the following headings may not be experiencing exclusion.

5.3.1 Long-term unemployment

While there are undoubtedly concentrations of the incidence of long-term unemployment within most of the urban centres, which are masked by the rates calculated for entire districts, [Map 46](#) also identifies a number of rural areas, especially in the Northwest where between 7% and 21% of the labour force were out of work for more than one year at the last Census.

While the number on the Live Register declined by 11% by end 1999, there were substantially larger declines in Laois and Westmeath with only Longford turning in a comparable performance (see **Table 10 and 10a**).

Table 10: No. Of recipients of Social Welfare benefits 1999 and percentage change 1996-99

	<i>Laois</i>	<i>Westmeath</i>	<i>Longford</i>	<i>Roscommor</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
One parent family Allowance 1999	704	1158	539	459	70387
% change 1996-99	55.1	47.9	66.4	50.5	39.2
Disability benefits	472	807	452	534	45535
% change 1996-99	11.9	10.1	6.9	1.14	7.2
Invalidity pensions	480	855	419	468	46946
% change 1996-99	12.9	18.1	3.7	13.6	9.1
No. on live register	2131	3282	2054	1876	176539
% change 1996-99	-33.3	-31.4	-14.7	-11.01	-34.6

Table 10a: No. Of recipients of Social Welfare benefits 1999 and percentage change 1996-99

	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
One parent family Allowance 1999	459	4511	70387
% change 1996-99	50.5	40.5	39.2
Disability benefits	534	3375	45535
% change 1996-99	1.14	8.7	7.2
Invalidity pensions	468	2849	46946
% change 1996-99	13.6	10.6	9.1
No. on live register	1876	19367	176539
% change 1996-99	-11.01	-26.9	-34.6

5.3.2 Elderly persons living alone

In 1996 there were just over 2346 persons aged over 65 living alone in Roscommon, 27.4% of the total aged over 65 years. Females in this category outnumber males by more than two to one. The distribution of over 65s living alone as a percentage of the total population reflects to some extent the overall age profile with the highest rates in the most rural areas, especially north of Roscommon town ([Map 47](#)).

The planned re-organisation of services by the Western Health Board should facilitate as many older people as possible availing of services within a 12-mile radius of their home.

5.3.4 One-parent families with young children

One-parent families with all children aged less than 15 years may experience difficulties in relation to obtaining housing and also in regard to participation in the labour force. [Map 48](#) shows that there is a very marked divide between the very rural areas and the rapidly growing urban areas in relation to the incidence of lone parent families. According to data from the Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs the number of recipients of the lone parent family allowance in Co. Roscommon increased by over 50% between 1996-99 compared with an increase of 39% in the State (**Table 10 and 10a**).

5.3.4 Persons with a disability

Table 10 and 10a also shows that in 1999 there were 534 persons in the county in receipt of disability payments, representing an increase of a mere 1% relative to 1996. This constitutes a substantially smaller increase relative to the other counties shown and the State as a whole.

There was also a significant increase in the numbers of persons in receipt of Invalidity Pensions in the county (+13.6%).

5.3.5 Access to Childcare facilities

The availability or non-availability of childcare facilities is another factor that may contribute to social exclusion arising from an inability to participate in the workforce outside the home.

The absence of affordable and accessible childcare facilities undoubtedly is a significant barrier for many women in relation to taking up work outside the home or participating in training and education programmes. The more limited availability of facilities and the poor quality of the public transport service in rural areas further exacerbate the problems associated with childcare for women with scarce financial resources.

The number of Pre-School Services which are registered with the Western Health Board is 52. Only 12 provide a Full Day Care service. Full Day Care means the provision of a structured service for children for more than 3.5 hours per day. There are also 7 Childminders registered. They can offer a service for a full working day all the year round in the Childminders own home.

These services are concentrated around Roscommon town and Boyle. There is very little Childcare provision in other urban areas such as Castlerea (2), Frenchpark (1), Elphin (0) and Carrick-on-Shannon (1) ([Map 49](#)). Areas in the north of the county around Arigna and Ballaghaderreen. are most disadvantaged and have the least Childcare provision. According to the national Childcare census 1999 there are 579 children aged 0-12 years in the county attending childcare facilities. 91 in full-day care and 488 in sessional care. There are 89 children on waiting lists for childcare places. (National Childcare Census report, (ADM) 2001

The supply of good quality childcare will have to be addressed in the near future to cope with the increased number of women with children who require childcare. This service needs to be provided in both rural and urban areas across the county.

5.3.6 Travellers

Travellers are a group that has traditionally felt excluded from many aspects of mainstream society. Roscommon County Council. Run a number of educational programmes for Travellers, including training courses for Traveller women. There are 48 families living in the county. Accommodation is provided either on halting sites or in houses. Fifteen families are housed (2 in-group housing and 13 in standard housing). Eighteen are on permanent serviced halting sites, four are on temporary serviced sites and four are on two unauthorised sites. There are seven families on a hybrid development of group housing and halting bays. The families moved into this accommodation in December 1999. A supervisor will oversee the management and maintenance of this accommodation. It is expected that further developments of this type will be built throughout the county in coming years. The projected increase in families requiring accommodation by 2004 is 18. ([Map 50](#))

5.3.7 Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and non-nationals.

There are approximately 20 Asylum Seekers in Strokestown. This is the only Direct Provision site in the county. There are some other families in private rented accommodation in Strokestown, Roscommon, Castlerea and the Athlone area.

Non-nationals make up 11% of the total workforce of Roscommon town. (*Roscommon Citizens Information Centre*) Languages spoken by Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and non-nationals in County Roscommon in order of priority are Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Nigerian, Croatian and Polish.

6. QUALITY OF LIFE

The importance of maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for all members of the population has emerged as an objective in many recent studies that have begun to articulate a sustainable concept of development. Indeed, one of the five objectives of the National Spatial Strategy is to “improve the quality of life for all sections of society”. Research on quantifying Quality of Life, undertaken for the National Spatial Strategy has identified different sets of factors that influence quality in rural and urban contexts.

In rural areas key issues are the provision of education at first and second levels and also employment and training opportunities. Other important issues are health care provision, leisure and recreation facilities and public transport. Access to public transport is particularly significant in the more disadvantaged rural communities, especially for persons and households belonging to the lower social classes.

For towns and villages the research identified a large menu of factors that contribute to a good quality of life. Places that have the majority of the following attributes are regarded as having a good quality of life:

- good income level and distribution,
- high level of personal material assets (e.g. home ownership)
- access to economic, social and physical infrastructure,
- low crime level,
- good quality affordable housing units,
- balanced social mix,
- good community interaction (clubs, organisations, etc),
- high quality historic heritage,
- balanced industrial, service and tertiary employment mix.

The term quality of life is used here as a multi-dimensional concept that embraces issues related to cost of housing, the quality of the natural environment and the cultural heritage; the availability of health services and other forms of social supports and protection; provision of recreational and leisure facilities, and parity of access to information. Most of the themes discussed in previous sections are also relevant to this concept especially access to education, range and quality of employment opportunities, settlement patterns which affect travel to work times, spatial segregation of social classes, and initiatives to overcome barriers to social inclusion, etc. In the remainder of this section data are presented on a number of indicators of the different dimensions noted above. A comprehensive analysis for all parts of the county is not feasible due to the absence of the requisite data.

6.1 Affordable housing

Local Authorities have a responsibility to assist persons requiring housing but who are unable to pay the full market price. The Local Authority can provide

assistance in a number of ways that include building and allocating housing to those in need, capital or rental subsidy schemes, shared ownership options, low cost loans for private house purchases, and paying rent of privately owned accommodation.

At the end of 1995 Roscommon County Council had 1169 houses. During the period 1996-2000 over 220 houses were built, with 100 being built in 2000. Authorisation has been granted by the DOELG for 400 houses to be built or acquired in the period 2000-2003. In November 2000 there were 748 applications recorded on the housing waiting list.

6. 2 Quality of the natural environment

The concept of sustainable development has at its core the notion that development aimed to meet the needs of the current generation must not reduce the capacity of the environment to sustain the needs of future generations. In effect all development actions need to take account of their potential environmental impacts. There are a number of areas in County Roscommon that are particularly important from an environmental perspective. These include 20 Special Areas of Conservation and 39 proposed Natural Heritage Areas ([Map 51](#) and [Map 52](#)).

6.3 The cultural heritage

The Census of Population provides data on the number of persons aged over three years who can speak Irish. The data provides a crude measure of competence (subjectively assessed) in relation to ability to speak the language but it does not provide any information on the level of usage of Irish on a regular basis. [Map 53](#) shows that the highest proportions (approximately 50%) are in districts concentrated just south of Roscommon town with a handful of districts located in the Northeast.

6.4 Availability of health services and other forms of social supports

The level and quality of health care has a major bearing on the quality of life. The Western Health Board (WHB) has overall responsibility for delivery of a very wide range of healthcare programmes and also for provision of facilities, general and specialist, to cater for the needs of the population which was estimated for the three constituent counties as 352,353 in 1996. The activities of the WHB are complemented by a number of supports provided by the Department of Social Family and Community Affairs.

6.4.1 Health Services

Table 11 shows comparative indicator data on health status for the WHB region and the State as a whole. The overall death rate for the region is significantly ahead of the national average as the rates from deaths due to diseases of the circulatory system and cancer.

Table 11: Health status indicators for the Western Health Board Region

	Western Health Board		Ireland	
	Crude Death Rate	Number	Crude Death Rate	Number
Death Rate:	992.2	3,571	846.2	31,352
Diseases of the Circulatory System	449.2	1,616	356.0	13,191
All Cancer	216.8	788	202.2	7,493
Injury & Poisonings	40.3	145	47.2	1,747
Suicide	12.5	45	13.6	504
Motor Vehicle Traffic Accidents	8.9	32	11.6	426

Source: D.O.H Health Statistics 1999

Acute Hospital services (e.g., A&E, General Medicine, General Surgery Obstetrics & Gynecology and Pediatrics) are provided at five main locations:

- Mayo General Hospital, Castlebar
- Regional Hospital Merlin Park, Galway
- Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe
- General Hospital, Roscommon
- University College Hospital, Galway

Key comparative statistics on the operation of Roscommon General Hospital with those in the WHB region as a whole are given in Table 12.

Table 12: Comparative statistics on Roscommon General Hospital

	<i>Occupancy Rate %</i>		<i>Length of Stay</i>		<i>In Patient Admissions</i>	
	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996
Roscommon	77.3	89.0	6.7	7.8	4,943	4,809
WHB	83.6	82.9	6.5	6.4	57,884	58,007

Source: D.O.H Health Statistics 1999

It is noticeable that, while the numbers of in-patient admissions have actually fallen, that the occupancy rate and the average length of stay have both increased significantly between 1994 and 1996 and relative to the overall health-board area.

6.4.2 Transport Services

For many rural residents access to services is a factor that can impinge on the quality of their lives. Bus Éireann provides a limited public transport service. Many of the Bus Éireann services are very infrequent, while inter-town and village connections are extremely restricted.

Over recent years there has been much concern over the provision of postal services in many rural areas. In addition to their primary function, the post office network is used for a wide variety of other services including:

- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs payments,
- Television licence sales,
- Bill payments (e.g. Eircom, etc)
- Money transfers,
- Savings and investments,
- National Lottery.

Rural post offices also serve as important meeting places for people who may have limited opportunities to visit the local village. Recent analysis has revealed that many post offices are loss-making operations and that the overall situation is likely to deteriorate further over the medium term. In order to maintain the rural network it will become increasingly necessary to generate new business. One option is that all government departments should be required to maximise the amount of their business that can be channelled through the rural network.

There were 62 post offices in Roscommon in 1999. The rural network consists of 56 post offices with an average population served of 744, compared with the national average of 1000. Thus the overall position for the rural network in Roscommon is better than in other counties but ultimately much will depend on the overall strategy adopted by An Post in relation to the network. If An Post were to lose the contract it has with the Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs it would have very significant financial implications for the Company and especially for the future of the Network.

Personal security and concerns about the security of personal property are increasingly an issue that affects the quality of many people's lives. While the issue is relevant to all almost all age groups it is particularly important for elderly people and especially those living alone. There are 19 Garda stations dispersed throughout the county ([Map 54](#)).

Fire fighting is another important safety service provided by the Local Authority. There are 6 fire stations at strategic locations throughout the county ([Map 54](#)).

6.5 Recreation and leisure facilities

The availability of recreational and leisure facilities and attractions of various descriptions also enhance the quality of life of both Roscommon's inhabitants and visitors to the county (see [Map 41](#)).

Almost every village throughout the county has facilities for some field-based sports. In addition there are 7 golf courses, a racecourse in Roscommon town, many facilities for coarse fishing and there are also a number of walking routes such as the Suck Valley Way and the Arigna Miner's Way. There is one public outdoor swimming pool in Castlerea, and a swimming pool and leisure centre in the process of being built in Roscommon town. During the summer season many festivals are organised throughout the county. Indoor leisure and entertainment are poorly served; there are no cinemas in County Roscommon. A very welcome Arts Centre, however, has just been completed in Roscommon town.

6.6 Parity of access to information

As society has become more educated there are increasing demands for access to information in a variety of formats. In order to cater for increasing numbers of readers there is a need for a well-resourced and accessible library service. Roscommon County Council supports the county public library service from its headquarters in Roscommon town. There are, in addition, 5 branches throughout the county. ([Map 54](#)). A special postal service for the visually impaired is operated with the assistance of An Post and a Social Worker for the Blind.

7. SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

This section provides an overview of the current position in relation to some key elements of physical infrastructure that are necessary to support development in Roscommon that will be sustainable.

7.1 Transport

Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann provide a limited service in County Roscommon. For many rural residents access to services is a factor that can impinge on the quality of their lives. Bus Éireann provides a limited public transport service. Many of the Bus Éireann services are very infrequent, while inter-town and village connections are extremely restricted. There are three rail lines that pass through county Roscommon. The Dublin Hueston to Westport line, Dublin Heuston to Galway line and the Dublin Connolly to Sligo line. The Westport to Dublin Route is currently being upgraded. A total of IR£30million (€38.1million) will be spent on laying 30 miles (48km) of track. This is part of the ongoing investment in the route that will see the completion of the upgrade in 2003.

The development of the transportation networks in the county will require an approach based on the principles of sustainable development which will require efforts to encourage greater use of public transport, especially for journeys to work. The current level of provision of public transport services is very limited, especially for movements between rural and urban areas and between the main urban centres, ([Map 55](#)).

7.2 Environmental Infrastructure

The main items of environmental infrastructure relate to water supply and sewerage schemes, and waste management. In 1999 there were 21 public water supply schemes and 20 public sewerage schemes under the control of the County Council. A Monitoring and Management system have been developed for the Lough Derg and Lough Ree catchments. The project is administered jointly with Clare County Council and is in keeping with the Government policy of having an integrated approach to water quality management. The construction and upgrading of a number of sewerage schemes has been taking place and were due for completion in 1999 and 2000. A programme for the provision and upgrading of the County's water schemes has also been ongoing. The programme includes the take-over of some group water schemes and capital grants for new schemes or improvements to existing group schemes.

Increasing population numbers and lifestyles associated with greater affluence are leading to ever increasing amounts of waste that requires to be disposed. In addition there are also very large amounts produced by agriculture and industry as well as by the construction sector. In accordance with the Waste Management Act 1996 and the Waste Management (Planning) Regulations 1997 Roscommon County Council has co-operated with the Councils of Counties Galway, Mayo Sligo, Leitrim and Galway Borough, to produce a Draft Waste Management Plan for the region. It is estimated that £300 million needs to be spent on the management of Connaught's waste to the highest standards over the next 15 to 20 years. At present, Roscommon County Council operates two landfill sites, at Roscommon and Ballaghaderreen. It is also responsible for the management of three closed landfill sites.

7.3 Electricity Infrastructure

The very rapid growth of the economy over recent years has resulted in very significant increases in the demand for electricity, which has placed considerable pressures on the generating stations and the transmission and distribution networks. Moreover the status of the network has a big role in the potential attractiveness of an area for the location of certain types of inward investment. The areas requiring improvement in the existing supply structure are exhibited in ([Map 57](#)) indicating that Roscommon does suffer deficiencies but Roscommon is not considered to have a "poor" infrastructure ([Map 58](#)).

7.4 Natural Gas

Natural gas is the cleanest of all fossil fuels and in terms of CO₂ emissions it produces the lowest level of CO₂ per tonne of oil equivalent. It is thus likely to experience a substantial increase in demand in the future as a replacement fuel for coal and oil in the drive to adhere to our Kyoto limits.

Following the discovery of a major natural gas reserve off Kinsale in the early 1970s and the eventual construction of a pipeline to Dublin and further north there has been a very large increase in the consumption of gas for electricity generation and also for residential and industrial heating and other uses. As demand increased the Kinsale gas supply was augmented by imports via a pipeline system from Scotland. A second interconnector pipeline was put in place in 2000 that will bring additional supplies ashore at Ballough in north Dublin from which a new pipeline will be laid to Galway and from there to the Shannon Estuary. It will also be able to take gas from the Corrib Gas Field.

While the exact location of the pipeline from Dublin to Galway has to be decided it is very likely that it will pass near Athlone, going eastwards across the county south of Roscommon town ([Map 59](#)). It will be possible to install distribution lines off the main pipeline, which will provide an alternative more environmentally friendly source of heating and power for residential, commercial and industrial users.

7.5 Information Communication Technology

Ireland has moved very rapidly into the Information Technology Age. The new information and communication technologies are very rapidly bringing about very significant changes in the nature of work, the types of economic activities undertaken in Ireland, the competitiveness of businesses, as well as having a major influence on individual lifestyles and especially on opportunities for independently pursuing lifelong learning. Central to the successful and widespread adoption of the new technologies is the provision of appropriate hardware and also of the skills to maximise the potential that these technologies offer.

The main hardware requirements are the provision of high-speed communication lines. A number of will undertake the provision of this infrastructure on a competitive basis privately owned commercial companies. The geographical pattern of provision to date ([Map 60](#)) suggests that there is a major risk of a digital divide emerging, with many areas to the north of a line from Dublin to Galway at a disadvantage. The most likely scenario is that the fibre optic cables will be provided by the private companies in those areas where there are potentially large numbers of customers at high densities. In this case the districts contiguous to Athlone are likely to be well serviced but the rural parts of the county especially in the Northwest and West may be left at a further disadvantage.

8. SYNTHESIS: A SPATIAL TYPOLOGY OF COUNTY ROSCOMMON

This section provides a synthesis of the spatial patterns that have been examined separately throughout the previous sections. It is based on a statistical analysis of 30 indicators that have been measured for each of the DEDs in the county. Furthermore, as the typology presented here is a component of a national map, it provides a basis for establishing the wider context for the creation of Roscommon's CDB strategy.

NUI Maynooth and Fitzpatrick Associates, for the National Spatial Strategy have prepared a rural typology map for all of Ireland. The map is intended as a summary of the different types of rural areas in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The map also identifies the urban areas, but these were excluded from the analysis as the focus was on identifying the different types of rural areas and how they relate to the urban centres. The classification is based on 30 statistical indicators measured from the Censuses of Population and Agriculture for the each of the 2,716 rural district electoral divisions (DEDs) in the State. It provides a summary synthetic profile for all DEDs in Co. Roscommon.

8.1 The Indicators

The analysis was based on indicators selected to measure the following aspects of the rural socio-economic structure:

1. Demographic structure (6 indicators)
2. Labour force characteristics (8 indicators)
3. Education and social classes (3 indicators)
4. Sectoral employment profiles (5 indicators)
5. Structure /strength of agriculture (3 indicators)
6. Changes in demography and labour force (5 indicators)

8.2 The typology map

The typology map shows the distribution of six types of rural areas and also the urban areas ([Map 61](#)). The areas have been given the following summary titles:

1. Peri-urban areas
2. Very strong rural areas
3. Strong agriculturally dependent areas undergoing adjustment
4. Structurally weak rural areas
5. Marginal areas
6. Highly diversified rural areas

The distribution of population by area type (including urban areas) for County Roscommon and adjoining counties are shown in **Table 13**.

Table 13: Percentage distribution of population by area type 1996

	<i>Laois</i>	<i>Westmeath</i>	<i>Longford</i>	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
Urban	30.8	44.5	16.1	23.8	60.7
Peri-urban areas	22.2	17.4	33.9	17.6	22.2
Very strong rural areas	21.0	14.8	8.4	0.0	10.4
Strong agricultural areas undergoing adjustment	16.2	5.5	19.5	10.2	16.2
Weak rural areas	6.3	14.7	15.6	45.0	6.3
Weak rural areas	1.7	1.2	6.4	3.1	3.0
Highly diversified rural areas	1.9	1.8	0.0	0.3	2.5

8.2.1. Peri-urban areas

These areas are generally characterised by high population densities, an advanced level of transition to a higher socio-economic profile (higher proportions with advanced levels of education, larger shares of the workforce in professional services and commerce functions), low level of reliance on agricultural employment and high levels of commuting to work. They are generally found in close proximity to urban centres and are particularly evident around the larger towns and the cities. In County Roscommon the peri-urban districts are essentially those parts of the open countryside that have been subjected to very high levels of urban generated adjustment, they contain 18% of the total population of the county.

8.2.2. Very strong rural areas

These areas are very prominent throughout the rural parts of the Mid-East and much of the Southeast. As well as possessing a strong agricultural base, DEDs that constitutes this cluster also exhibits an above average level of transition to non-agricultural employment. The rate of population increase in this category is generally higher than in the Peri-urban areas and is reflected in a more youthful population. The rate of increase in the number of persons at work is significantly larger than in the Peri-urban areas (15.5% compared to 12.7% for all of Ireland). It is noteworthy that not one DED conforms to this classification in Roscommon.

8.2.3. Strong agricultural dependent areas undergoing adjustment

In the wider national context these areas have a strong agricultural base due to a combination of larger farms with an orientation towards either dairying or tillage. Full-time rather than part-time farming is more the norm. Female participation labour force rates are below average and throughout all of these areas the rate of employment growth between 1991-96 was exceptionally low. Following the introduction of restrictions on agricultural output as part of the CAP reforms in the 1990s the opportunities for further expansion have become severely restricted. Only a little over 10% of the population of Roscommon fits into this particular classification.

8.2. 4 and 8.2.5 Structurally Weak and Marginal rural areas

These two area types represent the rural DEDs that are economically and demographically most disadvantaged. The defining attributes are a strong reliance on a very weak farm structure (elderly farmers on small farms producing very low levels of output, high level of decline in number of farmers, though they still account for the largest share of the workforce), low levels of employment in manufacturing or services and a below average level of self-employment outside agriculture, and the lowest level of females in part-time employment. These economic attributes have contributed to the emergence of a very weak demographic profile based on an ageing population with relatively fewer households with young children. These area types account for a substantial 48% of the population of Roscommon.

8.2.6 Highly diversified rural areas

Throughout the country this category is mostly associated with scenic and high amenity landscapes that attract large numbers of tourists and support a distinctive socio-economic profile. This type of area has emerged as having higher levels of self-employment outside of agriculture (22.4% of the workforce) and higher levels of part-time work especially for women, though the share of employment in manufacturing is very small (only 11% of the workforce in contrast to approximately 20% in most other areas). The demographic structure is typical of areas experiencing some net in-migration of persons aged over 25.

It is evident that only a single DED (Lisgarve) in Roscommon conforms to this sub-typology, and the population share is less than half a percentage point.

9. POINTERS TOWARDS THE CDB'S STRATEGIC PLAN

There are a number of key issues emerging from the analysis that require further consideration in the context of preparing the CDB strategy. These include:

- The need to situate Roscommon in the context of the National Spatial Strategy and in particular to recognise the strategic importance of Athlone and Sligo for the development of the County.
- Identify strategies to address a more balanced development profile within the county, especially between the Northern and Southern areas of the County.
- While acknowledging the sources of differentiation within the county there is a need to maintain a countywide focus and to avoid becoming too narrowly concerned with the needs of the individual electoral areas?
- Address infrastructure deficits within the County, including the implementation of the integrated waste management strategy.
- Focus on enhancing quality of life for all residents.
- Promote sustainable working and living conditions and provide opportunities for life-long learning.
- Increase labour force participation rates by addressing the deficit in local, especially rural transport, and by enhancing childcare facilities.
- Shift the balance of economic activity away from low value-added sectors such as agriculture.
- Enhance the competitiveness of all productive economic sectors and attract new sectors that will provide employment opportunities for a more highly skilled labour force and increase the level of wealth creation in the county.
- Promote sustainable use of all environmental resources.
- Improve access for residents of locations away from the radial routes.
- Overcome barriers that result in many different forms of social exclusion.
- Develop a coherent identity for Roscommon by enhancing the county's cultural environment.
- Enhance the range of educational opportunities and maximize the potential of existing educational resources such as IT Athlone and Sligo.