



Submission to CSO

2021 Census of Population

from the
Western Development Commission
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Western Development Commission
Dillon House
Ballaghaderreen
Co. Roscommon
Tel: 094 986 1441
Fax: 094 986 1443
Web: www.wdc.ie

Deirdre Cullen
Senior Statistician, Census Division
Central Statistics Office
Swords Business Campus
Balheary Road
Swords
Co. Dublin

Re: Census 2021

Dear Deirdre

I am writing in response to your email requesting feedback from the Western Development Commission (WDC) on its use of Census statistics generally and Small area data in particular.

The WDC is a statutory agency with responsibility for promoting economic and social development in the Western Region¹. One of the WDC's key roles is to advocate policy for the region and to make the case for public investment to enable development. In doing this much of our work entails analysis and research on regional and rural issues ranging from demography and migration to education, employment and economic growth to tourism, travel and transport patterns.

1. County and sub county level data

As the WDC region does not correspond to NUTS 2 or NUTS 3 regional classifications, the availability of county level data is critical to measuring the WDC Western Region. The Census is one of the few data sources which provide information at county level and nearly the only source at sub county level and is therefore a very important source for assessing the economic and social situation of the Western Region.

Census data provides for robust analysis at more detailed spatial and sectoral scales. For example, the WDC has examined the spatial distribution of employment growth across urban and rural areas, identifying the concentration of employment within key subsectors, for example 'the knowledge economy'. Only Census data can show accurately where this employment growth is occurring as well as assessing the spatial impact of various economic and enterprise development strategies.

Census data is also critical in allowing the creation of functional geographic units, in contrast to reporting data at the standard administrative geographic levels such as the NUTS regions. An example of this is the creation of travel to work areas and labour catchments which was developed for the first time from the POWCAR² data set from Census 2006³. The WDC commissioned analysis of this POWCAR dataset defining labour catchments in the Western Region as well as identifying travel patterns and transport demand. This analysis helped quantify and understand the scale and nature of rural and urban employment patterns across the entire Western Region.

It is likely that there will be increasing use of and demand for functional area analysis, in addition to labour catchments.

¹ Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare

² WDC, 2009, Travel to Work and Labour Catchments in the Western Region: A profile of seven town labour catchments

³ Place of Work Census of Anonymised Records

³ Census 2002 did provide a sample of this dataset.

For example the concept of *Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ)* defined as sub county zones within which most people live and work, REDZ are functional rather than administrative geographic areas that reflect the spatial patterns of local economic activities and development processes. The Department of Arts Heritage Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs administer the scheme. The pilot scheme was launched in June 2015 and €3.7m in total was allocated to 52 projects. Sub county small area data will be needed to evaluate such spending as well as to guide future expenditure.

Robust data can be hugely useful in helping to devise catchment areas for service provision such as health and education. The Census is the best and most robust source of demographic and socio-economic data at county and sub-county level.

Census data is also very valuable in considering cross border analyses. For example, the WDC Travel to Work report using Census 2006 data identified the extent of commuting from Donegal to work in Northern Ireland. The Irish and Northern Ireland Censuses 2011 will allow for more comprehensive evaluation of social and economic activity in both jurisdictions and can help document more effectively cross border economic and social activity. This is vital to informing All island policy across a range of areas.

In all of these examples, Census data is unique in providing accurate data at a small spatial scale (particularly at sub county levels) and unlike survey data is not subject to sampling issues and poor response rates especially at lower spatial scales.

2. Detailed examples of how the WDC uses small area data

The WDC has received a considerable number of queries and requests for small area data from local community and voluntary groups who are looking for small area demographic data on a remote rural area to inform and support an application for funding, including funding for services for older persons. We have responded to requests from community groups in several of our counties who need to access the SAPs data.

The WDC has also received requests from Local Authorities and Local Development Companies for similar small area data, in some cases for small area data within an large urban centre e.g. Cranmore Regeneration project in Sligo, and in others for more rural areas e.g. east Clare. Often these requests are related to funding applications or strategy developments which need to be informed and justified by a detailed understanding of the demographic and socio-economic profile of the area.

As a regional development organisation based in a largely rural region, the WDC can clearly see the strong spatial patterns in demographic, economic and social indicators at a small area level. County level, or even ED level, data cannot fully capture the complexities of spatial variations across the diversity of rural areas types in our region.

Small area data will be particularly important in evaluating and assessing the impact and effectiveness of policies outlined in the upcoming National Planning Framework and even more so the Regional Economic and Spatial Plans and the forthcoming Rural Action Plan.

The WDC uses most variables collected by the Census. Of particular importance are the following variables: Population by area, Demographic results, Ages, Occupation and Industry, Migration, Education, Transport, Travel and Commuting, Fuel Types.

WDC outputs which have drawn exclusively or heavily from recent Censuses include publications, WDC Board briefing papers, county profiles for WDC and Look West websites

(www.wdc.ie, www.lookwest.ie) and general data analysis to support and inform policy development.

The WDC has worked with the All Island Research Observatory (AIRO) to develop the WDC-AIRO Interactive Mapping Module. This illustrates the dynamics of local areas and counties in the Western Region by providing a visualization of Census data across a wide range of variables. Apart from being a resource in internal briefing papers and publications, the WDC has used the tool to provide information to Local Authorities and various sub county stakeholders.

Some recent examples of publications drawing heavily from Small Area Census data include

- *Preliminary Results Census 2016- analysis of results for the Western Region*
- The WDC formed the secretariat for the Government Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA). As part of the research for the Commission the WDC commissioned analysis of Census of Population 2011 small area data to identify commuting patterns from rural areas to urban areas including to specific IDA Industrial parks, see publications *Rural Commuting to Towns* and *Rural Commuting to Gateways & FDI Employment* and *WDC Policy Briefing no. 6: Commuting to Work: Rural Dwellers, Urban Jobs*
- *Travel to Work and Labour Catchments in the Western Region: A profile of seven town labour catchments* (2009). This latter publication was based on the Place of Work Census of Anonymised Records (2006) and it is planned to update this analysis with data from Census 2016.

We hope that this information proves useful and would be happy to discuss any of the points raised. If you have any queries please feel free to contact me at 094 986 1441 or deirdrefrost@wdc.ie.

Regards

Kind Regards



Deirdre Frost

Policy Analyst