Sligo.

2030 One Voice One Vision

Sligo Socio-Economic Statement
incorporating Vision and High-Level Goals
February 2022

Sligo. 2030 | LCDC

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On behalf of:
SLIGO COUNTY COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

1   Introduction

Sligo County Council is currently in the process of developing a strategic framework which will become Sligo's new Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) and will be known as Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision (Sligo 2030). Sligo 2030 will be an integrated Economic, Social, Community and Spatial Plan for all of Sligo and will guide the development of the Town and County over the next 8-10 years. The LECP will complement the County Development Plan and will be consistent with the broad locational policies of the CDP, for example in relation to locations for new developments such as business parks, retail developments, and industry.[1]

It is envisaged that the new plan will function as a strategic framework for a more cross-sectoral, coordinated and collaborative approach to local, community and policy development, and as such will mark a departure from more traditional unilateral models of development between agencies. The new plan will identify and implement actions to strengthen and develop the economic and community dimensions of the County and transform Sligo as it moves towards 2030.

This document outlines the policy context for the Sligo 2030 plan, a full socio-economic profile, an overview of the consultation process, a SCOT analysis, and a needs analysis covering both Sligo County and Town. It also includes a revised draft vision and revised draft high-level goals for the Sligo 2030 plan. As such, and in line with the statutory process for the development of Local Economic and Community plans, this document also acts as the revised Socio-Economic Statement. As outlined below, the summary profile of the County has been expanded to a full socio-economic profile of both Town and County, while the SCOT analysis has been further developed and strengthened. Similarly, the guiding principles, areas of ambition, draft vision and draft high-level goals have been reviewed and revised where applicable and are set out in Chapter 7. The findings from this document will be used to further develop and refine the Sligo 2030 plan as well as the related objectives and actions.

The chapter that follows this introduction covers the policy context and sets out the policy framework and principles to underpin the Sligo 2030 plan. This includes the international, European, national, regional, and local frameworks that set policy and best practice for social, economic and community development.

The chapter on the socio-economic profile identifies key statistics, trends and projections related to both Sligo Town and County. The chapter significantly expands on the summary profile of the draft Socio-Economic Statement and provides a full socio-economic profile of County and Town. It uses a Strategic Thematic Framework approach to broadly analyse a number of areas including population, the economy and employment, spatial context, transport, accessibility and mobility, digital

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[1] Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Guidelines on Local Economic and Community Plans, 2015.

transformation, community wellbeing, tourism, and the environment and climate change. This has assisted and contributed to identifying key strengths, constraints and needs for Sligo which are outlined in later chapters.

The chapter on the consultation findings provides a summary of the key themes highlighted during the stakeholder engagement process. The process was completed over the course of June and July 2021 and was undertaken with stakeholders from across a number of areas including the general public, community representative groups, local government, state agencies, education providers and the private sector. This included a public webinar, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, a survey aimed at the private sector and a survey for the wider community, as well as written submissions.

Building on the policy context and the statistics and facts identified through the socio-economic profile, the SCOT analysis which follows identifies key Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities and Threats relevant to the development of Sligo over the next 8–10 years. The SCOT analysis has also been supplemented through feedback received from the stakeholder and public consultation process outlined above.

The subsequent chapter on the needs analysis is the culmination of the policy context, the socio-economic analysis completed as part of the socio-economic profile, the consultation findings and the SCOT analysis developed to date. The section identifies 7 key headline needs that Sligo should address as part of the new Sligo 2030 plan. A summary of the identified needs are as follows:

- **Housing** – addressing the provision of housing and the lack of available private residential developments in Sligo to meet current and future demands.
- **Economy** – growing the employment base and creating more job opportunities.
- **Transport** – increasing mobility and accessibility to and from Sligo.
- **Revitalising Sligo's Town Centres** – the regeneration of town centres, improving the public realm and addressing the commercial vacancy rate.
- **Climate Change** – focusing, preparing, and acting on the challenges of climate change.
- **Community** – ensuring inclusion and adequate services.
- **Smart Sligo** – defining and measuring Sligo as a smart county.

While the 7 needs identified above will be key areas to address, it is important to note that another general theme highlighted throughout the consultation process was the need for more collaboration, coordination, and communication between key stakeholders and the community in Sligo. This includes Sligo County Council, government agencies, the private sector, education providers and the wider community. As such, to ensure that Sligo achieves its ambitions over the next 8-10

years, collaboration and clear communication needs to be at the heart of the implementation of the new Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision plan.

Finally, taking into account the completed analysis, the findings from the consultation process and the identified needs, the document outlines a revised draft vision and draft high-level goals as well as revised guiding principles and areas of ambition for the Sligo 2030 plan. The information and findings from this document, including the SCOT analysis and the key identified needs, will now be used to further develop the new Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision strategic framework.

Chapter Two
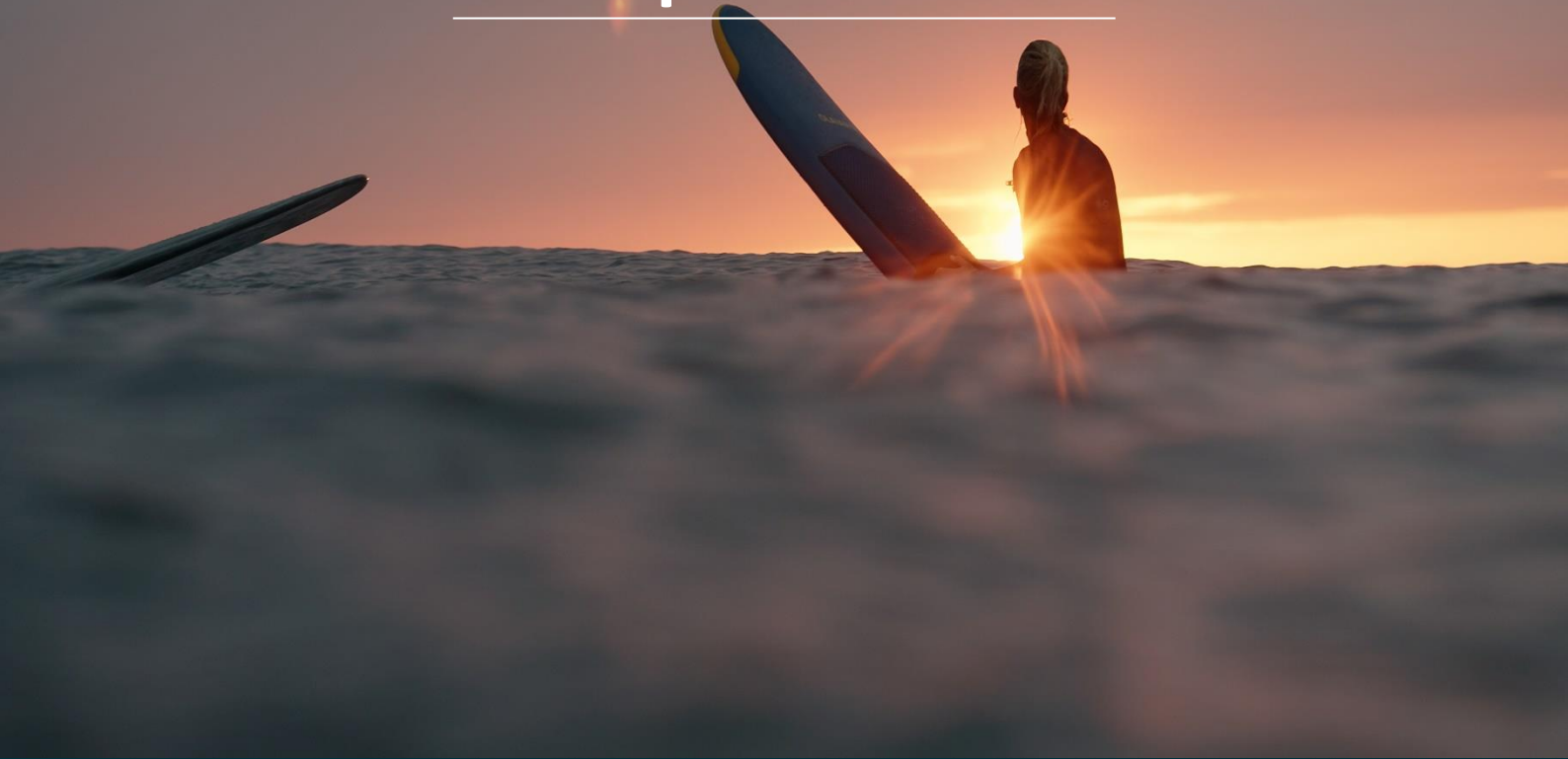
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POLICY CONTEXT

2   Policy Context

2.1   Principles to underpin Sligo 2030

This section sets out the policy framework and principles to underpin the Sligo 2030 strategy. This includes the international, European, national, regional, and local frameworks that set policy and best practice for social, economic and community development. This sets a strong foundation for shaping the vision and objectives for a Green and Smart Sligo in 2030. This policy foundation suggests several key themes that the Sligo 2030 plan can draw on:

- Driving economic development and building Sligo as an innovative and successful regional growth centre
- Embracing smart technology and digital transformation
- Incorporating **sustainable development** and **climate action** in all areas of life in Sligo
- Promoting social inclusion and equality in Sligo
- Strengthening and supporting **vibrant communities**
- Enhancing Sligo's vibrant culture, heritage, and the arts
- Ensuring **public participation** so that Sligo's people and communities own and drive the vision for Sligo in 2030

2.2   Policy framework for Sligo 2030

2.2.1   International and European frameworks

2.2.1.1   *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*

Sustainable development is the key principle internationally for meeting societal and economic goals while protecting the environment. The United Nations defines it as "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*."[2] Sustainable development is also a call to action to promote social and environmental improvement across the world, encapsulated since 2015 in the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030.

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[2] www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm

Figure 2-1: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

While all of the SDGs are interlinked, several are particularly relevant for Sligo 2030. For example, **Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities** provides a strong framework for action for planning and development around the world.[3] Goal 11 targets for 2030 include ensuring access for all to adequate housing, transport, green and public spaces, and services, and reducing the adverse environmental impact of cities and communities. This goal urges governments and cities across the world to consider how holistic development and improved services can improve lives and protect the environment. **Goal 4 Quality Education** sets out targets for 2030 for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning including ensuring equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, and substantially increasing the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Similarly, **Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth sets out targets** to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth. This includes targets for 2030 such as achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and those with disabilities, and implementing policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. **Goal 9 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure** sets targets to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation. By 2030, this includes upgrading infrastructure and retrofitting industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean technologies. **Goal 13 relates to taking urgent action to combat Climate Change** through strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity in all countries and ensuring climate change measures are integrated into national polices, strategies and planning. Finally, other relevant goals include, but are not limited to, **Goal 1 related to**

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[3] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/

Ending Poverty, **Goal 3 on Good health and Wellbeing**, **Goal 5 on Gender Equality** and **Goal 12 on ensuring Sustainable Consumption and Production**.

2.2.1.2 *'Europe 2020' and post-2020 Cohesion Policy for Europe*

The Europe 2020 strategy was the EU's agenda for growth and jobs for the decade to 2020. It emphasised smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as a way to overcome structural weaknesses in Europe's economy, improve its competitiveness and productivity and underpin a sustainable social market economy.

For the next long-term EU budget 2021-2027, the European Commission has issued an updated Cohesion Policy that will guide the EU's investment priorities across all areas. The five main objectives to drive investment in Europe are:

- A **Smarter Europe**, through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses.
- A **Greener, carbon-free Europe**, implementing the Paris Agreement and investing in energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change.
- A more **Connected Europe**, with strategic transport and digital networks.
- A more **Social Europe**, delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare.
- A **Europe closer to citizens** supporting locally led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

The Commission has also proposed a more tailored approach to regional development, such as adding new criteria for allocations (such as youth unemployment, low education levels, climate change, and the reception and integration of migrants) and strengthening funding for sustainable urban development.

2.2.1.3 *European Green Deal*

The European Green Deal is the European Commission's plan to make the EU's economy sustainable through a just and inclusive transition to a low-carbon future. It provides an action plan to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy, to restore biodiversity and cut pollution. Its overall aim is for the **EU to be climate-neutral by 2050**. It proposes actions across all sectors, including:

- Investing in environmentally friendly technologies;
- Supporting industry to innovate;
- Rolling out cleaner, cheaper and healthier forms of private and public transport;
- Decarbonising the energy sector;
- Ensuring buildings are more energy efficient;
- Working with international partners to improve global environmental standards.

Its delivery will be supported by the European Green Deal Investment plan which aims to mobilise at least €1 trillion in sustainable investments over the next decade. This includes a Just Transition Mechanism to ensure the transition to a sustainable

economy is fair to everybody by mobilising at least €100 billion to support workers and citizens most impacted by the transformation. However, achieving these goals also requires action by member state governments, local governments and communities.

2.2.1.4 *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies*

The Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (SUDS) is a joint initiative by the European Commission and aims to provide knowledge on how to implement integrated and place-based urban strategies under the EU Cohesion Policy. It aims to serve local authorities, managing authorities and all other relevant stakeholders in developing sustainable urban development strategies. The Handbook is structured around **two main purposes**:

1. An in-depth analysis of the state of play of urban strategies supported by the EU cohesion policy
2. Provides insights, examples, and recommendations for the design and implementation of the future generation of urban strategies.

Given the dynamics within the various contexts, cultures, politics of EU states and territories, the document is presented as a learning tool which helps respond to the needs of the different territorial and administrative contexts of EU states. The Handbook addresses the EU's integrated approach to urban development by means of **six building blocks**:

1. Strategic Dimension
2. Territorial Focus
3. Governance
4. Cross-sectoral Integration
5. Funding and Finance
6. Monitoring

The Handbook provides information on how to address the key challenges of each of these six outlined issues with accompanying recommendations for each issue.

2.2.1.5 *PEACE PLUS Programme 2021-2027*

The PEACE PLUS Programme is a €1 billion investment in the social, economic and environmental development of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, including Sligo. Delivered by the Special European Union Projects Board, it builds on the work of the previous PEACE and INTERREG Programmes. It will contribute to a more peaceful, prosperous and stable society in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, by funding activities that promote peace and reconciliation and contribute to cross border economic and territorial development. The programme will fund activities across six key themes, as shown below (with indicative allocations), encompassing 21 investment areas.

Figure 2-2: Peace Plus Programme Thematic Areas
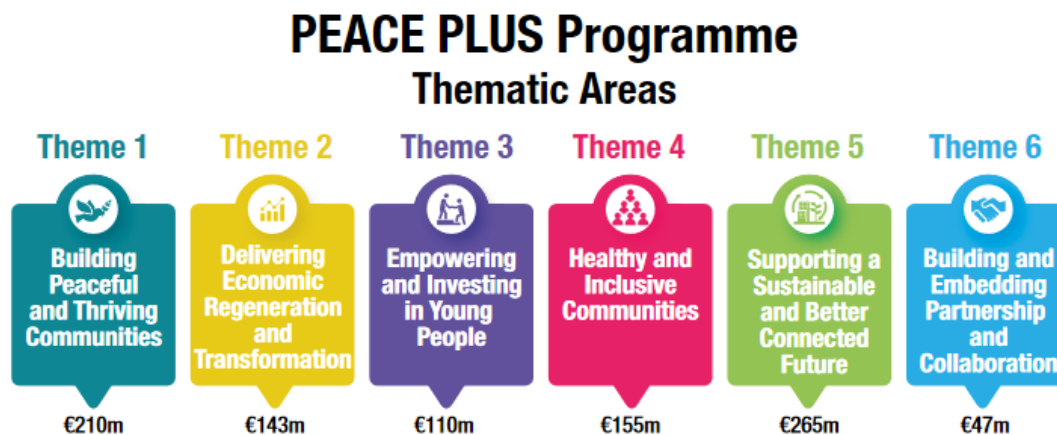
2.2.2 National policy framework

2.2.2.1 *Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (2018)*

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the high-level strategy that will shape growth and development in Ireland to the year 2040. The NPF draws upon lessons learned from the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2022 and provides a framework for the strategic and sustainable development of Ireland's regions and places, as an alternative to an uncoordinated "business as usual" approach. It aims to guide public and private investment nationally, to create and promote opportunities for Ireland's people, and to protect and enhance the environment.

A key element of the NPF is the identification of cities and towns that can serve as **regional drivers of growth and investment**. It identifies Sligo as having potential to serve this role in the North-West as an **accessible centre of employment and services**, which can be a **focal point for investment** and have the **widest possible regional influence**. Sligo Town serves a regional role across a large hinterland that extends into surrounding counties, with strong employment sectors such as pharma and engineering, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), cultural institutions and health services. As such, one of the key priorities for the Northern and Western Region is enhancing the town-region like functions performed by Sligo, activating the potential for further rejuvenation and renewal of its core and further enhancing its connectivity nationally and regionally.

2.3 Key thematic areas

The policy context for Sligo 2030 is built around a strategic thematic framework comprising eight themes, as shown below.
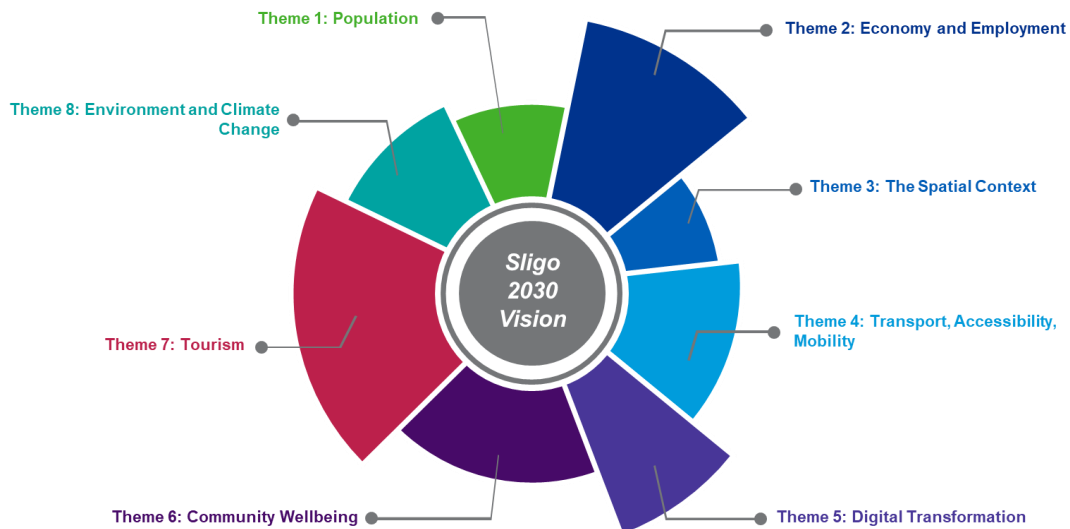
Figure 2-3: Sligo 2030 Key Thematic Areas

2.3.1 Theme 1: Population

2.3.1.1 *Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland*

The Programme for Government – Our Shared Future – sets out the Government's strategy to tackle the current housing crisis. As part of this programme, 'Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland' is the government's housing policy to 2030. It is a multi-annual, multi-billion-euro plan which aims to improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs.

The government's vision for the housing system over the longer term is to achieve a steady supply of housing in the right locations with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system, with a target to increase new housing supply to an average of at least 33,000 new units per year over the next decade.

To achieve these targets and objectives, the policy has **four pathways** to achieving housing for all:

- Supporting **home ownership** and increasing **affordability**
- Eradicating **homelessness**, increasing **social housing** delivery and supporting **social inclusion**
- Increasing new **housing supply**
- Addressing **vacancy** and efficient use of **existing stock**

The pathways contain actions to be taken by government departments, local authorities, State agencies and others. Housing for All contains **213 actions** which will deliver a range of housing options for individuals, couples and families to enable a sustainable housing system.

2.3.1.2 *Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025: Ambition, Goals, Commitments*

The 'Roadmap for Social Inclusion' is the Government's strategy for Ireland to become one of the most socially inclusive States in the EU. It aims to reduce the number of people in consistent poverty in Ireland to 2% or less and to position Ireland within the top five countries in the EU under a number of leading social inclusion measures. It defines social inclusion as "when people have access to sufficient income, resources and services to enable them to play an active part in their communities and participate in activities that are considered the norm for people in society generally." It sets out seven high-level goals including **extending employment opportunities** to all who can work; **ensuring work pays** through fair pay and conditions; providing **income security for older people**; **supporting families** and **reducing child poverty**; **reducing poverty among people with disabilities**; **building inclusive communities** and active citizenship; and ensuring that all people have **access to quality services** including health, housing, energy and food. It also sets 22 specific targets and 66 unique actions to help deliver these goals.

2.3.1.3 *Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2025 / Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025*

The **_Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2025_** is the national roadmap for building a healthier Ireland. Its vision is for "a healthy Ireland where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential, where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone's responsibility." The Strategy is based around four key goals:

- To increase the proportion of people who are **healthy at all stages of life**
- To reduce health inequalities
- To protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing
- To create an environment where **every individual and sector of society can play their part** in achieving a healthy Ireland.

The strategy recognises the critical role played by local authorities in protecting and promoting health and wellbeing at local level. It proposes a shift towards a broader, more inclusive approach to governance for health, moving beyond the health service to include national and local authorities, and involving all sectors of society and the people themselves.

The **_Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025_** provides an update to the 2013-2025 Framework and provides a roadmap for the next five years of implementation. It emphasises a 'whole of Government' and 'whole of society' approach to implementation. As well as assessing progress under Healthy Ireland for the first seven years to 2020 and providing updated actions and priorities across the Healthy Ireland thematic areas, it also updates Healthy Ireland to support the rollout of **Sláintecare**, the all-party Oireachtas policy to transform health and social care services for the Irish people. One of the key principles of Sláintecare is to promote health and wellbeing and prevent illness, and therefore the successful implementation of Healthy Ireland will be a crucial part of wider health service reform through Sláintecare.

2.3.1.4   National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027

The National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027 sets out a vision for Irish sport in 2027 along with **3 High-Level Goals** and their associated **57 Actions** to transform the Irish sporting landscape over the next decade. The policy aims to elevate Ireland to the top of the table globally for both participation in recreational and competitive sport and high performance and to pursue these aims over the next decade.

To support the realisation of this vision for the future of sport in Ireland, the policy outlines three high-level goals and associated actions to form the framework for which this vision can be achieved:

1. **Increased Participation:** higher proportion of Irish citizens participating regularly in all forms of sport
2. **More Excellence:** more Irish athletes and teams achieving world-class results at elite levels of sport
3. **Improved Capacity:** 'fit for purpose' sporting bodies at all levels with high levels of cooperation at all scales

To implement these goals and subsequently achieve the sporting vision for Ireland, the policy highlights the ambition to increase annual investment in Irish sport to over **€220 million by 2027**. This involves increased funding and investment in participation programmes and sports capital programmes.

2.3.1.5   Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020

'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' is the first overarching national policy framework for children and young people (aged 0-24 years). It seeks to align national commitments and policies for children and young people across five national outcomes, to ensure children and young people:

1   Are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing.
2   Are achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development.
3   Are safe and protected from harm.
4   Have economic security and opportunity.
5   Are connected, respected and contributing to their world.

To achieve this it sets out six transformational goals to shift Government policy, including supporting parents; ensuring earlier intervention and prevention; creating a culture that listens to and involves children and young people; ensuring quality services that are outcome-driven, effective, efficient and trusted; ensuring effective transitions between childhood and adulthood; and promoting cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination.

2.3.1.6   Migrant Integration Strategy – A Blueprint for the Future (2017)

The 'Migrant Integration Strategy' is the national strategy for integration for the period 2017 to 2020, envisaging a whole-Government approach targeted at all migrants,

including refugees, living in Ireland. The strategy's vision is that migrants are facilitated to play a full role in Irish society, that integration is a core principle of Irish life and that Irish society and institutions work together to promote integration. An important role is identified for local authorities in promoting integration. Key actions for the sector include the establishment by local authorities of networks aimed at reaching out to hard-to-reach migrant groups, increasing the number of migrant representatives in local authority fora and Public Participation Networks, ensuring multi-lingual materials on voter registration and that elections be made available and accessible, and drafting updated local integration strategies.

2.3.2 Theme 2: Economy and Employment

2.3.2.1 *Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan 2021 – 2030*
The National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 sets out the investment priorities that underpin the implementation of the National Planning Framework as part of Project Ireland 2040. Through a total investment of €165 billion, this level of capital spending aims to ensure ongoing cross-sectoral regional development and public investment. A large proportion of this investment is directed at major national infrastructure projects relating to sustainable mobility, international and regional connectivity, transitions to a low carbon and climate-resilient economy, compact growth, enhanced amenity and heritage among others.

Following from the NPF, it recognises Sligo's key regional role as a driver for investment and identifies several key infrastructure projects which can support and enhance Sligo's role. These include the Eastern Garavogue Bridge and approach roads in Sligo, the N17 Knock to Collooney road, a Sligo Cultural and Learn Hub, and the regeneration of Sligo University Hospital.

2.3.2.2 *Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021*

In July 2020 the European Council, made up of the Heads of State and Government of each of the EU Member States, adopted a historic **€750 billion recovery package** for Europe. This package, NextGenerationEU, is Europe's shared response to the public health and economic and social crisis caused by COVID-19. In order to avail of funding from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, each Member States must prepare a National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The overall objective of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is to contribute to a sustainable, equitable, green and digital recovery effort, in a manner that complements and supports the Government's broader recovery effort. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan is based on **25 investment projects** and reform measures spanning **3 Priority Areas** addressing **green** and **digital transition** along with **social and economic recovery** and **job creation**:

- **Priority 1:** Advancing the Green Transition
- **Priority 2:** Accelerating and Expanding Digital Reforms and Transformation
- **Priority 3:** Social and Economic Recovery and Job Creation

Within these 3 Priority Areas are several sets of investment plans to reinforce and realise the objectives within each Priority Area. The Plan is also aligned with domestic policies such as the Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) and the National Development Plan (NDP), which will see Ireland investing €165 billion in capital spend over the period from 2021 to 2030.

2.3.2.3 *Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025*

Our Rural Future is the national blueprint for the post-COVID-19 recovery and development of rural Ireland over the next five years. It seeks to transform the quality of life and opportunity for people living in rural areas. It focuses on nine thematic objectives:

- **Optimising digital connectivity** and the opportunities for rural communities from high-speed broadband
- Supporting employment and career opportunities in rural areas
- Revitalising rural towns and villages
- Enhancing participation, leadership and resilience in rural communities
- Enhancing public services in rural areas
- **Supporting a Just Transition** to a climate neutral economy
- Supporting the sustainability of Agriculture, Marine and Forestry
- Supporting the sustainability of our island and coastal communities.]
- Nurturing our culture and heritage

Each of these forms a focus for investment in infrastructure, such as in remote working infrastructure and in rural town and village enterprise hubs.

2.3.2.4 *Draft Sligo Local Enterprise Office Development Plan Framework 2021-2024*

The Sligo Local Enterprise Office (LEO) aims to provide local leadership in driving enterprise and entrepreneurship while directly supporting local businesses through provision of business support services. The LEO's Draft Development Plan Framework 2021-2024 will guide the organisation's work to 2024.

The Plan's strategic priorities include fostering competitiveness and digitalisation, promoting the Green agenda and sustainability, supporting innovation, promoting exporting and internationalisation, and encouraging business networks and clustering. Key actions of the Framework include supporting employment growth; providing training, mentoring and advice to small businesses; advancing the uptake of new technologies; promoting climate change awareness; providing programmes to drive competitiveness and exports; promoting female and student entrepreneurship; and working collaboratively with local stakeholders.

2.3.2.5   *Sligo City Centre Public Realm Action Plan (2018)*

The Sligo City Centre Public Realm Plan sets a single, coherent concept for the Town's public realm and seeks to transform Sligo into the leading town in the north-west region through the design of an attractive and vibrant town centre in which people want to live, work, socialise and shop. Its guiding principles include **putting people first** (designing spaces for people), **simplifying the streetscape**, **creating memorable and identifiable places** where people want to be, **protecting and enhancing Sligo's character and heritage**, **designing flexible multi-use spaces**, and supporting the proper functioning of the town centre.

It identifies a number of key locations within the urban core where there are significant opportunities to create high quality urban spaces including O'Connell Street, Stephen Street Cultural Plaza, Rockwood Parade and Quay Street carpark. These projects are being pursued by the Council with several having been granted funding under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund since 2018, including the O'Connell Street Enhancement and the Sligo Cultural Plaza.

2.3.2.6   *Sligo Corporate Plan 2020-2024*

The Sligo County Council Corporate Plan is a strategic framework for the Council over a five-year period, linking policy, organisational activity, governance, performance management and actions. Its overarching goal and mission statement is "to maximise economic, social, cultural and community development, to harness Sligo's potential as smart city/community, deliver efficient and cost-effective services in a democratic, sustainable and transparent manner in partnership with local communities, voluntary and statutory agencies." It sets several corporate objectives for the Council, including maximising economic development; promoting social inclusion and tackling poverty; tackling climate change and protecting the environment; promoting a socially inclusive smart city and county vision; and ensuring democratic and participative representation and accountability.

2.3.3   **Theme 3: The Spatial Context**

2.3.3.1   *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032*

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region came into force in January 2020, superseding the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border 2010-2022. The RSES is a high-level plan that seeks to support the implementation of the NPF by providing a strategic planning and economic framework for the region's sustainable growth and development. It echoes the NPF in emphasising sustainable development patterns and seeks to focus growth within existing urban areas and in key regional growth settlements including Sligo Town.

The Northern and Western Region is a European **'Region in Transition'** (as GDP per capita is between 75% and 100% of the EU average), which means that for the 2021 - 2027 funding period the region will benefit from 'positive discrimination' for structural funding allocation.

The RSES identifies several key risks and challenges facing the region, including the economic and cross-border impacts of Brexit, risks from trade disruption and protectionism, the housing crisis, infrastructure constraints, climate change, disruptive technology, competitiveness challenges, and a widening economic gap between the region and the rest of the State as measured by Greater Value Added (GVA) growth. To tackle these, it sets out five growth ambitions for a region that is **Vibrant, Connected, Natural, Smart and a Great Place to Live**. These ambitions are developing **people and places** through compact growth and sustainable development; a **vibrant** region with strong economic growth; a **natural** region that addresses energy needs and climate change; a **connected** region with improved accessibility and mobility; an **inclusive** region with high liveability; and an **infrastructure** ambition to provide the infrastructure needed for the region's future.

The RSES provides a spatial planning framework for the region focussed on **compact growth and placemaking**, with more sustainable growth focussed on existing cities, towns and villages instead of uncoordinated sprawl or excessive one-off housing. More co-ordinated and concentrated development aims to deliver greater quality of life and more attractive centres for investment and economic growth. It identifies Sligo Town as a key **Regional Centre for Growth**, with a population growth target of at least 40% between 2016 and 2040.

It sets out a *Strategic Plan for Sligo* with the aim of creating "an enterprising, inclusive, resilient and environmentally sustainable place, which values and celebrates its unique landscape and rich culture and heritage, and where the wellbeing of future generations is central to everything we do." It sets goals for compact growth of the Town (including development of new housing and improved transport infrastructure); economic, heritage and cultural development (through supporting new enterprise zones, the new Technological University for the West and North-West, and investment in smart city infrastructure); and a liveable Sligo with public realm and active travel improvements as well as enhancements to key urban places.

2.3.3.2 *A Region in Transition: The Way Forward (Northern and Western Regional Assembly, 2020)*

'A Region in Transition: The Way Forward' is a study of the Northern and Western Region that makes a case for additional Government and EU investment through 'positive discrimination' towards the region to address regional economic, social, and environmental challenges. In 2019, the European Commission downgraded the Northern and Western Region from a 'More Developed Region' to a 'Transition Region' for structural funding purposes post-2020 due to the region's relatively weaker economic performance compared to other regions in recent years. This report notes

that the region has underperformed on several indicators of commercial activity and economic performance in the past decade, such as high commercial vacancy levels, below-average growth in high value jobs and low productivity levels. The report emphasises the importance of 'positive discrimination' towards the region in national and EU investment policy. There is significant capacity for this in many areas of State investment, with the region receiving below-average per capita levels of investment in roads, higher education, government Research and Development funding, and investment in public health infrastructure.

To maximise the effectiveness of public investment, the report recommends a focus on developing the region's designated Regional Growth Centres (including Sligo Town) and key towns, improving the region's human capital levels, enhancing regional infrastructure that enables growth, supporting SMEs in rural communities, and maintaining cost competitiveness. Key Growth Enablers identified for focussed investment for the region include national, regional, and local road infrastructure, higher education, Research and Development, health infrastructure, and airport infrastructure.

2.3.3.3   *Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023*

The Sligo County Development Plan is the statutory over-arching strategic framework for sustainable spatial, economic, social and environmental development in County Sligo. It seeks to set policies for Sligo that meet national and regional planning goals and guide the development of sustainable communities and economic growth.

The Plan identifies some key challenges for the development of Sligo. These include retaining and increasing the County's population; focussing on the role and development of Sligo Town; developing essential pieces of infrastructure; building Sligo's cultural offer to attract visitors and an internationally mobile workforce; improving the functions and performance of Ballymote, Inniscrone and Tubbercurry; and diversifying the rural economy while protecting the County's natural and cultural heritage.

The Plan's Core Strategy envisages a population rise of 5,500 or 7.7% across the County between 2016 and 2022 (requiring 3,705 new homes), including 2,500 targeted for Sligo Town and Environs and 3,000 for the remainder of the County.

The Plan also incorporates the extended *Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010-2016* which sets out detailed policies for Sligo Town. Its strategic goals include developing Sligo as a compact and sustainable town, facilitating economic development, promoting Sligo Town's keystone role in the County Settlement Strategy, conserving and enhancing Sligo's natural and cultural heritage, and building up wider regional and national infrastructural linkages in Sligo.

The Plan is supported by several evidence-based documents. The *Housing Strategy* examines existing and forecast future need for housing in the County, estimating that

865 households would require social housing by 2023. It supports the development of a broad range of housing types and tenures to meet demographic need, including housing suitable to the needs of older people, people with disabilities, the Traveller Community, and the homeless.

The *Sligo County Retail Strategy 2016-2023* examines retail and economic trends in Sligo and sets out recommendations for future sustainable retail development. It suggests gradual improvement and growth in the sector over the Plan period. It supports strengthening the retail hierarchy of the County by supporting the central function of Sligo Town while enhancing and maintaining retailing in key towns and the remainder of the County.

2.3.4   Theme 4: Transport, Accessibility and Mobility

2.3.4.1   *National Transport Authority Statement of Strategy 2018-2022*

The Statement of Strategy 2018 – 2022 by the National Transport Authority is a high-level national policy document which outlines the vision, intent and actions undertaken by the NTA towards the improvement of Ireland's public transport infrastructure from the period of 2018 to 2022. The document aims to leverage its vision towards successfully commencing and completing capital work programmes relating to public transport infrastructure improvements across Ireland. Hence, the vision for the 2018 – 2022 period is:

'To provide high quality, accessible, sustainable transport connecting people across Ireland.'

To realise the vision of the Strategy, the **mission statement sets out five key goals** relating to elements such as sustainable transport capacity, transport experience, availability, and accessibility:

1. Secure the provision of an **efficient, accessible, and integrated** transport system in rural and urban Ireland.
2. Transform and elevate customers' **transport experience**.
3. Regulate privately operated transport services for the **benefit of consumers**.
4. Contribute to the **effective integration** of transport and land use policies.
5. Advance Ireland's transition to a **low emissions** transport system.

The goals are supported by **eight priority areas** which provide the foundation for a number of objectives:

- **Priority 1:** Undertake strategic transport planning seeking the optimal alignment of land use and transport policy and practice, enabling an increased proportion of travel by sustainable transport modes.
- **Priority 2:** Promote the use of more sustainable modes of transport.
- **Priority 3:** In line with available funding, implement an effective infrastructure investment programme that delivers sustainable and public transport infrastructure in a cost-effective manner, which is complemented by appropriate traffic and demand management measures.
- **Priority 4:** To regulate the provision and enhance the quality of the small public service vehicle (SPSV), commercial bus sectors for passengers and potential passengers and some clamping activities across the State.
- **Priority 5:** Secure the optimal provision of high-quality subsidised public transport services in the State.
- **Priority 6:** Develop and secure the infrastructure to ensure a seamless customer experience across all travel modes.
- **Priority 7:** Maintain and enhance a professional organisation to meet current and future challenges and to drive excellence in governance and service delivery.
- **Priority 8:** Develop and manage external relationships.

These priorities contain within them specific objectives and accompanying milestones to be achieved over the course of the strategy.

2.3.4.2 *Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022*

The Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan is the National Transport Authority's first strategic plan for the Local Link Rural Transport Programme and covers the period 2018 to 2022. The strategy is aligned with the NTA's Statement of Strategy for the same period. The key priorities of the Programme include addressing rural social exclusion and the integration of rural transport services with other public transport services. The mission statement of the Programme is:

'To provide a quality nationwide community based public transport system in rural Ireland which responds to local needs.'

In line with the NTA's Statement of Strategy, the mission statement is supported by **nine priority areas** which provide the foundation for a number of objectives:

- **Priority Area 1:** Sustaining the Rural Transport Programme
- **Priority Area 2:** Route Development & Expansion
- **Priority Area 3:** Integration with other Statutory Services
- **Priority Area 4:** Accessibility of Services
- **Priority Area 5:** Access for All
- **Priority Area 6:** Ensuring the RTP delivers an optimum Customer Experience
- **Priority Area 7:** Children and Young People
- **Priority Area 8:** Encouraging Innovation in Rural Transport Service Provision
- **Priority Area 9:** Monitoring Progress of the RTP

It is intended that the key objectives and actions outlined across the nine priority areas will result in a strengthened Rural Transport Programme by 2022, and a Programme that is dedicated to identifying local transport needs and responding with high quality accessible, and sustainable local transport solutions.

2.3.4.3 Investing in Our Transport Future: A Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport

The Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport (SIFLT) was published by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (now Department of Transport) in 2015, and outlined high-level priorities for future transport investment following the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent funding constraints, and established the key principles to which investment proposals had to adhere. The SIFLT was produced to provide steady state investment guidelines and investment levels required to maintain, manage, and renew the existing transport infrastructure to keep it in an adequate condition.

Given this precedent towards the need to attain funding levels that are consistent with maintaining, renewing, and improving an appropriate transport network that can efficiently support the economic and social needs of the country, the SIFLT outlines 3 priority areas which reinforce the sentiments of the role of the Framework:

- **Priority Area 1:** Achieve steady state maintenance
- **Priority Area 2:** Address urban congestion
- **Priority Area 3:** Maximise the value of the road network

The aim of establishing these priority areas is to provide the 'yardstick' against which national and regional, comprehensive, and single mode-based plans and programmes will be drawn up and assessed. A new Framework, known as the Planning Land Use and Transport – Outlook 2040, is currently being developed and is due to be published in 2021, following a revised publication date originally set for 2020.

2.3.4.4 NWRA Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy 2020 – 2032 (Transport Priorities)

The RSES is a high-level plan that seeks to support the implementation of the NPF by providing a strategic planning and economic framework for the region's sustainable growth and development. It echoes the NPF in emphasising sustainable development patterns and seeks to focus growth within the footprint of existing urban areas and in key regional growth settlements.

The RSES contains **Transport Investment Priorities** to support the development of a connected region under Growth Ambition 3 of the Strategy. These Transport Investment Priorities range in scope and include various modes of transport both private and public:

- **Priority 1:** International Connectivity

- **Priority 2:** Road Network
- **Priority 3:** Rail Network
- **Priority 4:** Bus Network
- **Priority 5:** Rural Transport
- **Priority 6:** Walking and Cycling
- **Priority 7:** Enabling Plans – Local Transport Plans

Sligo is identified as a Regional Growth Centre within the NWRA RSES and has subsequent Regional Policy Objectives (RPO's) specifically relating to its spatial and economic growth regarding the development of a connected, sustainable and efficient transport system throughout Sligo and its role in further connecting the North-West region and its key metropolitan and rural areas:

- **RPO 6.8:** The delivery of work in the medium term on the N15 Sligo to Bundoran and N16 Sligo to Blacklion.
- **RPO 6.10:** The East-West (Dundalk to Sligo) Road will be pursued incrementally in the short and medium term, to be delivered to an appropriate level of service.
- **RPO 6.15:** Promote enhancement of the capacity of the Sligo to Dublin rail line

2.3.4.5 *Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023 (Transport Infrastructure)*

The Sligo County Plan 2017-2023 sets out the proposed policies and objectives for the development of Sligo over a 6-year plan period. The Development Plan seeks to develop and improve, in a sustainable manner, the social, economic, environmental, and cultural assets of Sligo.

Regarding the development of transport infrastructure in Sligo, the Plan carries over the national and regional objectives towards transport infrastructure growth and transposes these objectives to a local level. The Plan outlines **seven strategic policies** which form the basis of the County transport strategy:

- **SP-TRA-1:** Support the creation of an integrated and environmentally-sound transport system, in particular with regard to accessibility and choice of transport, with a quality intercity bus and rail service, alongside the promotion of cycle facilities and pedestrian movements.
- **SP-TRA-2:** Make optimal use of existing transportation infrastructure by using traffic management in order to reduce travel times and congestion. Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023 Consolidated Draft + Adopted Amendments – August 2017 Volume 1, Chapter 8 – Transport and mobility 136
- **SP-TRA-3:** Encourage the shift from car use to more environmentally friendly modes of transport and ensure the provision of quality interchange facilities between road, rail, bus and bicycle in relevant settlements.
- **SP-TRA-4:** Plan for the future traffic and transportation needs in Sligo and ensure that new development does not compromise the expansion of rail, road and cycling corridors in the County. Proposed road realignment/improvement lines, road corridors and national cycle route corridors shall be preserved free from development that would prejudice the implementation of the schemes.
- **SP-TRA-5:** Promote improved access to and sustainable development and operation of Sligo Port and Sligo Airport (Strandhill) and subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive.

- **SP-TRA-6:** Facilitate and encourage the provision of adequate car-parking facilities in Sligo Town and the County's towns and villages.
- **SP-TRA-7:** Facilitate the roll-out of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, in line with the National Renewable Energy Action Plan's target for 10% of Ireland's vehicles to be electric by 2020.

These policies are reinforced by three strategic objectives which aim to advance further policy to realise the strategy at a local level, secure funding for the various projects stemming from the County transport strategy and align with the sentiments of related national and regional transport policy. The Plan also refers to the Ten-T EU-proposed transport network, with several roads and corridors within Sligo earmarked to be incorporated within the development of the Ten-T network.

2.3.5   Theme 5: Digital Transformation

2.3.5.1   *Sligo Digital Strategy 2020-2023*

The Sligo Digital Strategy's objective is to embrace digital innovation to showcase what is possible in a rural town on Europe's western seaboard. It builds on the vision of the Sligo LECP 2016-2021 to be a leading smart city and region by 2025. It acknowledges the severe challenges and changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought about increased digital reliance and rapidly expanded the digital landscape. The strategy's vision is to support the climate action agenda, promote increased economic activity in the region and town, and deliver improved social inclusion. It sets out four strategic pillars for delivering this including **increasing digital skills** across the County, **improving digital infrastructure**, **delivering digital services and community/culture** initiatives, and **fostering innovation, enterprise, digital economy and employment**. Each pillar covers a series of specific objectives, initiatives and projects, informed by the digital infrastructure needs of the County.

2.3.5.2   *Sligo Smart City Roadmap (2019, unpublished)*

The Sligo Smart City Roadmap builds on Sligo County Council's ambition to position Sligo as a smart city destination by 2025. It sets out what this vision means and how new smart technologies can be deployed to enhance the quality of living of Sligo's citizens.

The Roadmap's mission statement is that through developing smart infrastructure and capabilities "…Sligo will become the location of choice for Smart City technology providers for small regional towns globally." Its vision is for Sligo to be a global exemplar of smart city technology in towns of its size, for assets and infrastructure to be available for connectivity, and to bring new employment to the region. Key implementation measures include putting digital transformation and smart technology at the heart of Sligo County Council's daily operations, ensuring smart infrastructure availability is cost-effective and easy to access, and building partnerships with commercial and academic third parties to deliver digital transformation.

2.3.6   Theme 6: Community Wellbeing

2.3.6.1   *Sligo Age Friendly Strategy 2016-2020*

The Sligo Age Friendly Strategy aims to improve the lives of all people in County Sligo as they age and to create a county where future generations can reach old age feeling healthier, more positive and more engaged. The strategy reiterates Sligo County Council's commitment to the 2011 Dublin Declaration on Age Friendly Cities and Communities, which expresses a clear and strong commitment to strengthen and champion action to make communities more age friendly and highlights the need for ongoing improvement across a range of interrelated domains of older people's lives. It seeks to create Age-Friendly places (based on the World Health Organisation (WHO) definition) that anticipate and respond to the needs and preferences of older people, respect their decisions, protect the most vulnerable, and promote their inclusion and contribution in all areas of community life.

The strategy covers eight themes for action, including outdoor spaces and buildings, transport, housing and home, value and respect, social participation and inclusion, civic participation and employment, information and communication, and community supports and health services. The implementation, monitoring and ongoing evaluation of the strategy is supported by several structures including the Sligo Age Friendly Alliance, the Age Friendly Implementation Group, and the Sligo Older People's Council.

2.3.6.2   *Building a Culture of Sports and Physical Activity in Sligo – 2018-2023.*

The Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership (SSRP) strategic plan for 2018-2023 is built on the vision of sport and recreation as a way of life in Sligo. It aims to build a culture of sport and physical activity through planning, leading and co-ordinating an integrated approach to sustained participation. It sets four main goals: to increase participation, build capacity, enhance communication, and strengthen the SSRP organisation. In spreading the benefits of sport and recreation throughout the County it emphasises inclusion and accessibility including through targeting disadvantaged groups and children and young people. It also encourages collaboration across different sport and physical activity networks to promote greater sport and recreation activity and to deliver the strategy.

2.3.6.3   *Sligo and Leitrim Children and Young People's Services Committee: Children and Young People's Plan 2017-2019*

The Sligo and Leitrim Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) is responsible for planning and co-ordinating services for children and young people across agencies in counties Sligo and Leitrim, in order to help realise the national outcomes set out in 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures'. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) brings together evidence and information from a range of sources to set out a current picture of demographics, service provision for children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim, and local needs across the five national outcomes of 'Better

Outcomes, Brighter Futures'. It sets out a series of local priority areas across each of the five outcomes and an action plan for addressing each priority area, stressing the importance of cross-agency co-operation through the CYPSC in delivering actions.

2.3.6.4 *Sligo County Council – Disability, Inclusion and Access Strategy 2019-2022*

The Sligo Disability, Inclusion and Access Strategy sets out Sligo County Council's strategy on how it will provide for the needs of all people across the services that it delivers to the public. It seeks to support a cultural shift away from viewing disability as a medical condition and towards the **social model of disability** which asserts that disability is caused by the way society is organised and recognises the disabling barriers built into the environment and social structures. It seeks **disability mainstreaming**, where people who are disabled enjoy equal rights and opportunities to participate in public life, have choice and control over how they live their lives, and are enabled to reach their full potential. The strategy's vision is for an inclusive society where people who are disabled and have disabling conditions are facilitated to participate equally in all aspects of social life. The strategy's mission of removing barriers to participation is supported by an action plan with targets across several themes, such as promoting equality, choice and universal design in public services, promoting employment opportunities for people who are disabled, person-centred disability services, accessible transport and places, and promoting independent living in the community. The strategy also identifies areas where the Council will collaborate with other organisations such as the HSE and state agencies.

2.3.7 Theme 7: Tourism

2.3.7.1 *County Sligo Council Tourism Strategy 2018-2023*

The County Sligo Tourism Strategy is the strategic roadmap for guiding the development and direction of Sligo's tourism industry. Developed by Sligo Tourism Ltd. and Sligo County Council, its goal is to "ensure the growth of the industry in an orderly and sustainable way, delivering world-class visitor experiences and achieving the highest possible economic and social return on tourism activities for the County." Tourism is an industry worth over €100 million and employing 2,700 people in County Sligo, with almost 450,000 visitors annually. The strategy sets out four strategic priorities for the tourism industry over the lifetime of the strategy:

1. **Product and Experience Development** – with the development of Sligo's Yeats heritage as a primary theme/attraction and outdoor activities, archaeology, culture and creativity as secondary themes
2. **Marketing and Communications** – including a unified county brand, best-in-class web and digital presence, and strong collaborative marketing national and international campaigns
3. **Industry and Capability Development** – with annual skills development and visitor service plans and cooperation with training stakeholders

4. Leadership and Collaboration – with co-operation across the industry including county and national partnerships

2.3.7.2 *Sligo Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018 – 2022*

The Sligo Culture and Creativity Strategy reflects the aspirations of Sligo County Council and the national Creative Ireland programme to enable creativity in every community. It aims to build on Sligo's rich cultural heritage, landscape, music and people to realise greater community participation in culture and creativity. It envisages "'a **Creative Sligo** where communities are aware of and appreciate the **uniqueness of Sligo's landscape and heritage**" and a Sligo that **"values creativity, culture** and through collaboration and sharing of resources **provides greater access to participate and engage in culture and creativity** at all levels." It is guided by the Creative Ireland values of Collaboration, Communication, Community, Participation, Inclusivity and Empowerment. The strategy sets out priorities for Sligo under key themes of talent and creativity; creative communities; connectivity and infrastructure; creativity and innovation; inspiring environment and unique heritage; and resourcing and management.

2.3.7.3 *Sligo Arts Plan 2020-2025: Sustain, Renew, Collaborate*

The County Sligo Arts Plan 2020 –2025 aims to renew Sligo County Council's role as a leading development agency and strategic partner in arts development. It puts great emphasis on the value of the arts in enriching life in Sligo and celebrates the many thriving and connected communities of artists, creative people and organizations in the County. Its overall vision is to "create an environment where **the intrinsic value of the arts is widely recognized** across all sectors of society and to **support an ecosystem where the arts thrive** to the benefit of artists, communities and visitors to the county." Its key actions and priorities include establishing an Arts Officer post within Sligo County Council, supporting arts practitioners, promoting public participation, building Sligo's arts infrastructure, ecosystem and economy, and encouraging and commissioning art in the public realm.

2.3.7.4 *County Sligo Heritage Plan 2016-2020*

The Sligo Heritage Plan is a partnership plan for the built, natural and cultural heritage of Sligo, prepared by the County Sligo Heritage Forum. Its aim is to "inspire our community to know, value and care for Sligo's unique heritage and to increase awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of our heritage for all." It is underpinned by the principles of sustainable development, proper planning, social inclusion, and best practice. Its strategic themes and actions include raising awareness of Sligo's heritage, promoting the conservation and management of Sligo's heritage, increasing understanding of the value of Sligo's heritage, promoting community participation in heritage plans and projects, and recording the heritage of Sligo and disseminating data.

2.3.7.5 *County Sligo Diaspora Strategy 2019-2024*

The Sligo Diaspora Strategy sets out a plan for linking, liaising and collaborating with the 'Sligo Diaspora' made up of the wider Sligo family who do not live in the County because they have moved or were born somewhere else in Ireland or overseas. It develops the Sligo LECP 2016-2021's aim link with Sligo's Diaspora, aiming to strengthen 'the Sligo family' socially and economically by building its economic and community capacities and the sense of belonging of the County and its people. The Sligo Diaspora is a large and diverse group that includes over 19,000 Sligo-born people living abroad, including 8,000 in the UK, reflecting a long history of emigration from the County. The strategy's goals of building connections and engaging with the Diaspora incorporate four themes covering economy and jobs (including bringing investment and opportunity back to Sligo); arts, heritage and culture; tourism and genealogy; and sport and community. It also promotes regional collaboration across county boundaries and using digital connectivity to more easily link with the Diaspora.

2.3.7.6 *Sligo Brand Marketing and Communications Strategy 2020-2025*

The Sligo Economic Forum (SEF) was established to help deliver on the goals of the Sligo LECP 2016-2021, particularly to drive co-ordination and strategic planning in the collective promotion of Sligo. As part of this, the SEF and Sligo County Council created the **'Sligo: Live Invest Visit'** brand and communications project to create a more cohesive visual and message for Sligo. The Sligo Brand Marketing and Communications Strategy underpins the 'Sligo: Live Invest Visit' campaign by setting out key messages, audiences and responsibilities. It also sets overarching brand guidelines and templates to ensure a common identity across agencies.

2.3.8 Theme 8: The Environment and Climate Change

2.3.8.1 *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2021*

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2021 secures Ireland onto a legally binding path to net-zero emissions and achieving a climate neutral economy by 2050. The Bill will establish a legally binding framework with targets and commitments set in law, and ensure the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to ensure Ireland achieves its national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term.

The Bill sets out the frameworks for achieving these goals through establishing obligations, processes and commitments for government departments, local authorities, and public bodies to follow from the enactment of the Bill. These elements relate to strategy development at all levels of government, with the Bill introducing:

- A 'National Climate Objective' on a statutory basis, which commits to pursue and achieve no later than 2050, the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally sustainable, and climate-neutral economy
- The process of embedding carbon budgeting into law

- A 'National Long-Term Climate Action Strategy' to be prepared every five years
- A requirement for each local authority to prepare a 'Climate Action Plan', which will include both mitigation and adaptation measures and be updated every five years

The Bill marks an important step taken at a national level to recognise the importance of incorporating climate change action into Irish law and across all levels of government, at both national, regional, and local levels. It also provides the legal basis for establishing a comprehensive and joint effort in tackling the negative impacts of climate change on our economy, society, environment and communities.

2.3.8.2 Climate Action Plan 2019

The Climate Action Plan 2019 is the current national plan to tackle the climate crisis, meet Ireland's Paris Agreement requirements, and bring about a transformational shift of Ireland's economy and society towards climate resilience and sustainable development. Its fundamental aim is to achieve a **net zero carbon energy systems** objective for Irish society and in the process, create a resilient, vibrant and sustainable country. The climate transition and major cut in emissions required to meet Ireland's goals needs action across all sectors of the economy and every level of government and society. This includes carbon proofing all Government decisions and major investments, the adoption of a Mandate for Climate Action by all public bodies to prioritise climate action in the public sector and building green criteria into public procurement. The Plan aims to **reduce public sector carbon emissions by 30%** and improve the energy efficiency of public sector buildings by 50% by 2030. National goals include generating 70% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030, upgrading 500,000 homes to 'B2' BER standard by 2030, and planting an average of 8,000 hectares of new forest per year.

Local Authorities play a key role in providing public sector leadership on climate action in their areas and in mobilising action at a local and community level. With the assistance of the Climate Action Regional Offices, Local Authorities will be supported to build their capacity. Project Ireland 2040 funds will be used to support local government climate action ambitions and measures, and 'climate action community engagement' offices will be piloted to enable Local Authorities to become key partners and enablers of an expanded network of Sustainable Energy Communities. A Climate Action Charter for Local Authorities will be developed to drive climate action, and support will be offered to local government in developing activities under the Charter.

The Government has announced its intention to publish a new Climate Action Plan in 2021, which is expected to further update and strengthen national climate action policy.

2.3.8.3 Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030

Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030 is a strategy developed by the County and City Managers Association (CCMA) to deliver on the ambition of the Local Authority Climate Action Charter and to **maximise the role of local government in providing leadership on climate action** and climate adaptation. The strategy prioritises decarbonisation and

climate adaptation, to meet Ireland's climate requirements while also mitigating risks from climate change. The strategy's vision is to "leverage the capability, reach and resources of local authorities to effectively address climate change across Ireland." It sets out six ambitious strategic goals, each addressed through a set of focussed objectives:

- Fostering Governance, Leadership and Partnership for Climate Action
- Achieve Carbon Emission and Energy Efficiency Targets for 2030 and 2050
- Deliver on Climate Adaptation and Climate Resilience
- Mobilise Climate Action in Local Communities
- Mobilise Climate Action in Enterprise and support Transition to an Inclusive, Net Zero and Circular Economy
- Achieve a 'Just Transition' particularly for Communities that may be Economically Disadvantaged by Decarbonising Projects

2.3.8.4 *Climate Ready Sligo: Sligo County Council Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024*

Climate Ready Sligo sets out Sligo County Council's strategic priorities, measures and responses for adaptation in County Sligo over the years 2019-2024, in accordance with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. The strategy recognises the risks associated with increased frequency of climate change related events such as extreme weather events. The strategy is based on the two distinct but complementary objectives of **adaptation** (identifying risks and taking action to prevent or minimise damage) and **mitigation** (reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit climate change). The strategy identifies the scale of the challenge posed by climate change and the existing and potential future climate risks for Sligo, such as flooding, coastal erosion, threats to biodiversity, risks to critical infrastructure and buildings, and threats to agriculture. It sets a series of objectives and actions, under the three strategic goals of **Engaging**, **Planning** for climate impacts, and **Adapting** the everyday operations of the Council to climate change and sustainability.

Chapter Three

3

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

3 Socio-Economic Profile

The following Socio-Economic Profile provides the results of an analytical and qualitative analysis utilising the best available data on demography, households, economic activity and employment, travel patterns and connectivity - all with the intention to inform the objectives of the Sligo 2030 plan. The analysis has been approached using the strategic thematic framework set out below.

Figure 3-1: Sligo 2030 Strategic Thematic Framework

The areas for analysis include:
— **Population** – which analyses population, household characteristics and levels of educational attainment.
— **Economy and Employment** – which examines economic activity, employment in different industries, and the impact of COVID-19.
— **The Spatial Context** – which includes an urban/rural comparison and analysis of the planning pipeline.
— **Transport, Accessibility, and Mobility** – which explores the transport infrastructure and means of travel throughout the County.
— **Digital Transformation** – which reviews the level of connectivity, digital infrastructure development and digital innovation policies in the County.
— **Community Wellbeing** – which examines the level of deprivation, and several other community wellbeing indicators for people in the County.
— **Tourism** – which explores local and international tourism figures in the County and Region.
— **The Environment and Climate Change** – which includes analysis of conservation, renewable energy and other sustainable measures and initiatives applied in the County.

This Profile focuses on the distribution and pattern of statistical trends in both Sligo Town and County, first building on 2016 Census data using departmental statistics and state agency datasets which are then aggregated with monthly released data to provide a current view of each element of the Strategic Thematic Framework. The CSO Census 2016 provides a baseline assessment of the demographic profile of Sligo and is the foundation dataset for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) RSES projection and the Ireland 2040 plan. Where possible each thematic element references an associated regional and national framework. The data covers a wide range of elements such as Housing numbers, ICT infrastructure, Community Development and Climate Adaption. Where possible, a predictive analytical approach has been applied to the CSO Census 2016 data and most recent releases of figures for employment, transport, and housing. The findings from this analysis will be used to inform the development of the Needs Analysis which will identify several targeted areas to address over the next 8-10 years.

3.1   Data Selection

To provide a social overview of Sligo County, data provided by the national agency POBAL has been retrieved to measure deprivation and social inclusion. To give an insight into housing and household numbers, national property indices provide a county wide insight into the Sligo housing landscape. Economic and employment data has been retrieved from a number of sources such as the national Business Demographic records for information on economic strength, while national Labour Force Survey data has been used to analyse employment numbers. This data is mirrored with Live Register and Quarterly National Household Survey results to review unemployment figures and trends over recent years. Where possible regional comparisons have been provided to give a benchmark of where Sligo County and Town are in comparison with neighbouring Counties.

Using specific transport data provided through national vehicle registration records and travel patterns recorded from Census 2016 the mobility of Sligo can be outlined. Digital service data and infrastructure has been linked from the published Sligo IT Strategy giving an overview of the local initiatives underway and planned for launch over the coming years. Quality of life data links back to a number of initiatives such as proposed cycling facilities and laneways outlined in the new Sligo Cycling Strategy and national wellbeing initiative. Finally, climate and environmental data has been included from the Sligo Climate Adaption Strategy and has been referenced alongside the National Climate Action plan.

3.2 Theme 1: Population

3.2.1 Population Characteristics

As seen in Figure 3-2, the population age composition of Sligo Town and County Sligo are quite different, with the County having a larger proportion of its population between the ages of 0-14 compared to the Town. Proportionately the Town has a more even split of residents in the ages from 20 to 59, while the older population breakdown is similar in the Town and County overall.
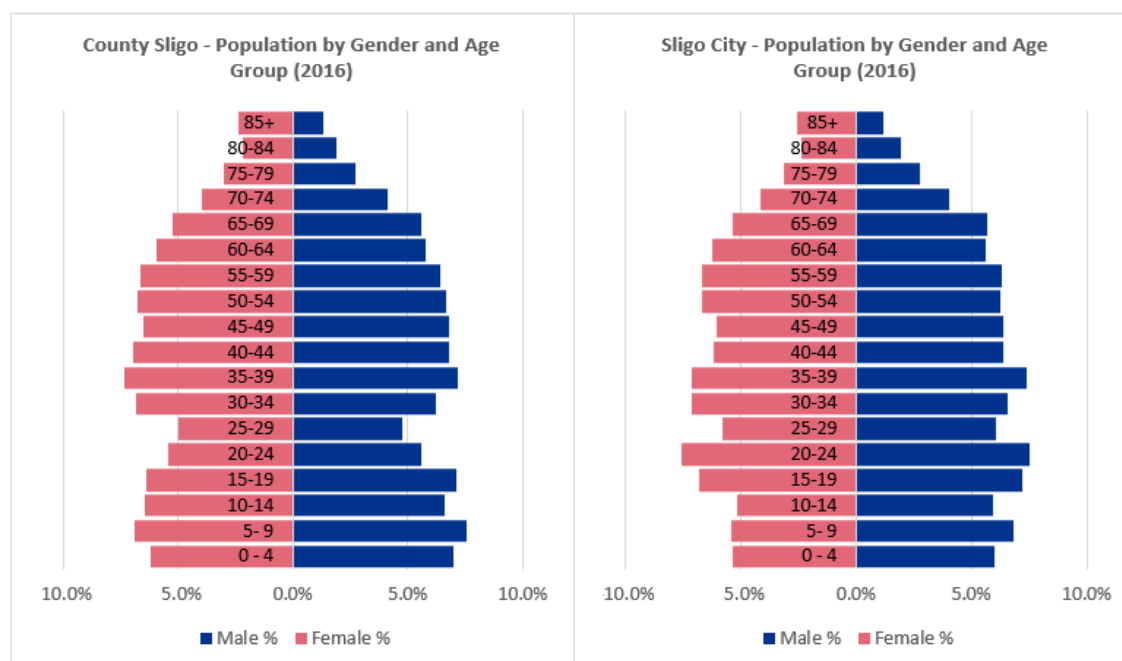
Figure 3-2: County Sligo and Sligo Town Population Pyramid Comparison

According to 2016 Census figures analysed for this assessment, the County population of 65,535 increased by 0.22% from the 2011 Census count, compared to a 0.4% decrease in the Sligo Town population. Despite the decrease of 19.9% in people aged 20-29 in the Town, this cohort still had the largest portion of the population, and much larger when compared to County figures. Increases in population were recorded at opposite ends of the population pyramid, as the number of people aged 0-9 years increased by 2.9% and 4.7%, and people aged 70-79 years increased by 18% and 16.3% at County and Town levels respectively, from 2011 to 2016.

Table 3-1 below indicates the breakdown of the study area population by school going, adult and senior/retired age groups. As seen in the table, both Town and County Sligo have proportionately higher population in the senior/retired age groups.

Table 3-1: Sligo Town, County Sligo, and State Population by Age Group (Summary)

Age	Sligo Town			County Sligo			State
Age	2016 No.	% Change (from 2011)	2016%	2016 No.	% Change (from 2011)	2016%	2016%
0-14	4,775	2%	17%	13,313	2%	20%	21%
15-64	18,246	-5%	66%	41,598	-4%	63%	66%
65+	4,588	19%	17%	10,624	17%	16%	13%
Total	27,609[4]	-0.4%		65,535	0.2%		4,761,865

The comparatively small increase in population in the 0-14 year age cohort is also reflective of the number of registered births in the County, with 774 births registered in 2016, which equates to 1.18% of the overall County population. This figure is lower than the 1.34% births to total population seen at State level in the same year. The number of registered births in the County remained relatively stable over the five-year period, with a slight decrease in 2019 and 2020. In turn the number of deaths occurring in the County has shown a net increase from 2016 to 2020, as seen in the figure below. By 2040, the Population of Sligo County is to exceed 80,000 increasing by over 25% with Sligo Town expected to have a population exceeding 47,000. 50% of the population will be under 35, with a large percentage possessing Third Level qualifications in high skilled industries.
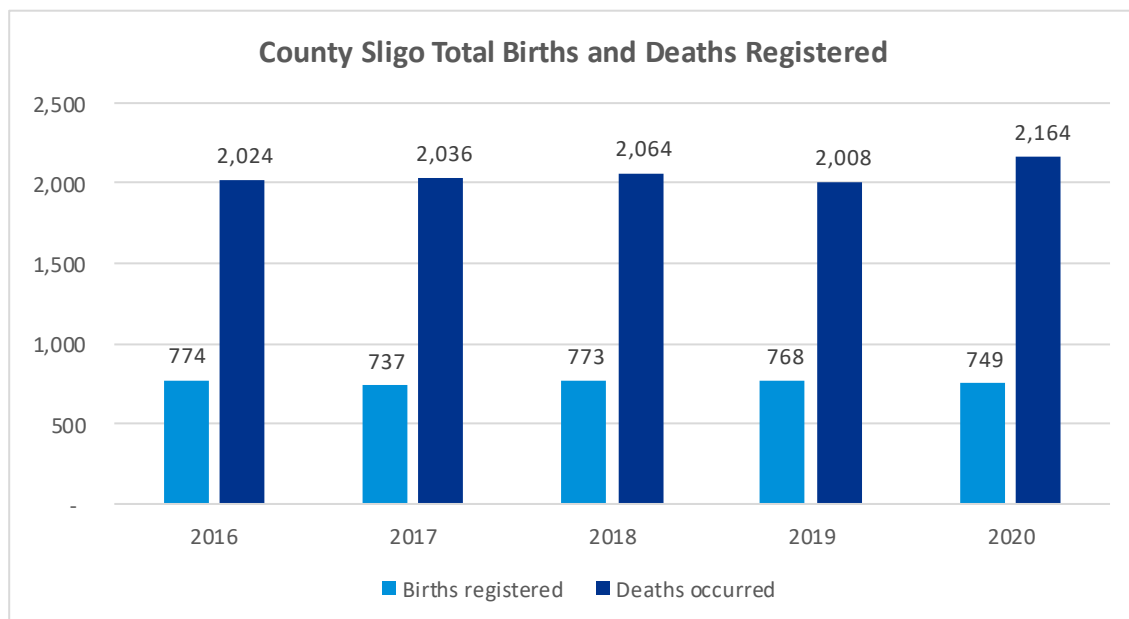
Figure 3-3: County Sligo - Total Births and Deaths Registered

The Sligo County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 (Sligo CDP), Border Regional Authority Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 (Border RPGs)[5], and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020 – 2032 (RSES) set out population targets for the County and Sligo Town, as seen in Table 3-2 and Table 3-3.

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[4] Includes population of Sligo Town, Rosses Point, Ballincar, and Strandhill, hence variation from the 19,199 population of Sligo Town (CSO settlement boundary) as stated Table 2-3.

[5] Border RPGs were replaced in 2020 by the RSES for the Northers and Western Regional Assembly

Table 3-2: County Sligo Population Figures and Targets

County Sligo		
Source	**Description**	**Population**
Census 2006	Confirmed population (CSO)	60,894
Census 2011	Confirmed population (CSO)	65,393
Census 2016	Confirmed population (CSO)	65,535
Border RPG	Initially recommended population target for 2022	77,350
Sligo CDP and RSES	Population target for 2026	71,500 − 72,500
	Population target for 2031	74,000 − 75,500

Table 3-3: Sligo Town Population Figures and Targets

Sligo Town		
Source	**Description**	**Population**
Census 2006	Confirmed population (CSO)	19,402
Census 2011	Confirmed population (CSO)	19,452
Census 2016	Confirmed population (CSO)	19,199[6]
Border RPG	Initially recommended population target for 2022	23,700
Sligo CDP and RSES	Population target for 2023	23,050
	Population target for 2026	23,600
	Population target for 2031	25,800
	Population target for 2040	27,200

The Border RPGs set out initial population targets to 2022 for both County Sligo and the Town and Environs area. These were subsequently revised through the Sligo CDP, with further projections set out to 2040 to align with figures proposed by the National Planning Framework. The demographic stagnation demonstrated by the 2016 Census is reflected in the fact that almost all the greenfield land zoned for housing in 2011 remained undeveloped for an extended period of time. The RSES for the Northern and Western Region 2020 − 2032 highlights the importance of building critical mass of population, in addition to the provision of relevant goods and services that support quality of life, in order to leverage Sligo's regional capacity as an administrative, employment, commercial, health and education growth centre. The Sligo Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan described in the RSES delineates the principal area for where this business, social and residential growth should be focussed. The RSES's population target is set at 27,200 by 2040, supported by the development of 3,000 − 5,000 residential units.

Within the County a total of 84% of residents recorded a birthplace within Ireland, with 89% of residents possessing Irish nationality. The second most common birthplace recorded within the County was those from the UK with 8%. However, this figure decreased to 3% for those with UK nationality. The third most common birthplace recorded was Poland with 2% and the same figure for nationality. The remaining 6% of birthplaces recorded were other EU countries and countries outside of the EU. Within

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[6] Sligo Town population figure from 2011 to 2016 not considered as a decrease due to a change in the statistical boundaries of Sligo Town following the abolition of Sligo Boroughs in 2014.

Sligo Town, a similar trend was recorded with 81% of residents recording Ireland as their birthplace while Irish nationality was recorded at 87%. Similarly, 6% of residents recorded having a UK birthplace while only 2% recorded UK nationality. Again, the third most common birthplace was Poland with 3% and this figure was also recorded for Polish nationality. Sligo Town did contain a higher percentage of residents who possessed a birthplace in other EU countries with 3% and countries outside of the EU at 6%. However, the number for nationalities from countries outside of the EU decreased to 3%.

3.2.2   Household and Housing Characteristics

Trends in household data from the intercensal period for the study area are summarized in the table below.

Table 3-4: Sligo City, County and State Household Compositions

Composition of Households	Sligo Town		County Sligo		State
	Change 2011-16	2016%	Change 2011-16	2016%	2016%
One person	5%	30%	4%	28%	23%
Married couple	10%	16%	9%	17%	15%
Cohabiting couple	9%	4%	-1%	3%	4%
Married couple and children	-5%	24%	-2%	29%	31%
Cohabiting couple and children	36%	3%	25%	4%	4%
Father and children	14%	1%	6%	2%	1%
Mother and children	8%	10%	6%	9%	9%
Couple and others	-26.9%	1%	-29.4%	1%	1%
Couple children and others	-8%	1%	-16%	1%	2%
Father children and others	29%	0.2%	16%	0.1%	0%
Mother children and others	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Two or more family units	-24%	1%	-23%	1%	1%
Non-family households and relations	-10%	2%	-12%	2%	2%
Two or more non-related persons	-27%	6%	-24%	3%	4%

As indicated in Table 3-4, there are only slight variations between the household compositions as recorded for Town, County, and State household profiles. The Town and County figures do however show a proportionately higher percentage of single person households compared to the State average. Together with married couples and children, the two composition types make up more than half of all households in the Town and County (in line with State figures). The number of households with (single or more than one) parents with children increased, while cohabiting family units, or other non-related household units decreased. The slight increase in the number of households, along with an even lower increase in population, resulted in a decrease in the average household size from 2.6 in 2011 to

2.56 in 2016 at County level, while the average household size in Sligo Town decreased from 2.49 to 2.43 over the same period.

For qualifying persons or households with lower income and in need of social housing support, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme provides assistance in the form of rent contributions that enable people to rent adequate housing. The following figure provides an overview of the number of households making use of the HAP scheme in County Sligo from 2016 to 2019.

County Sligo - Households Receiving HAP
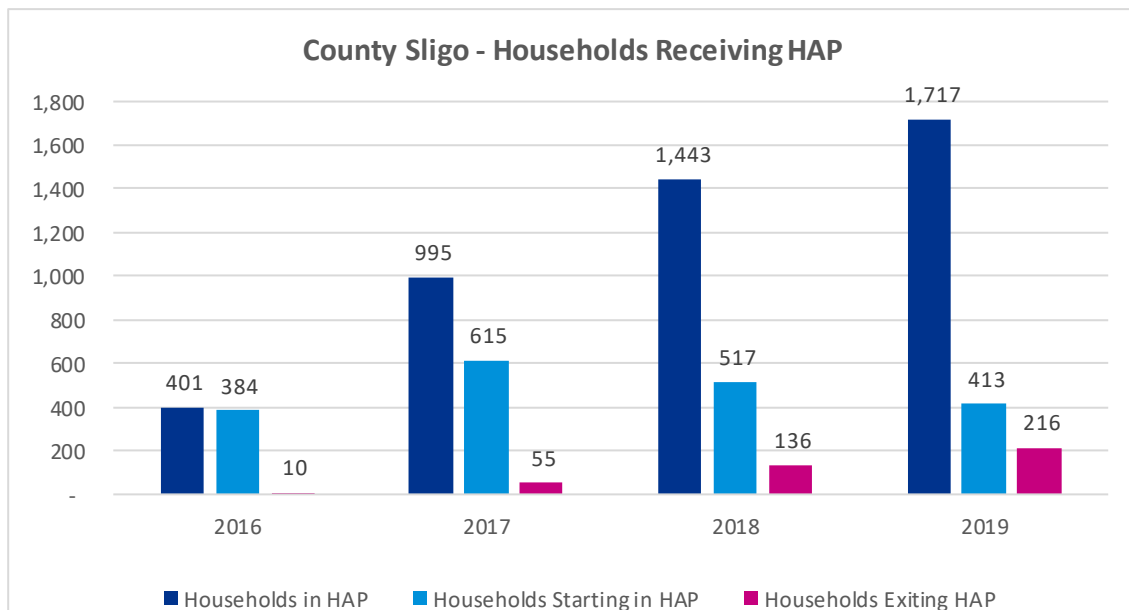
Figure 3-4: Household receiving HAP in County Sligo

As seen in Figure 3-4, the number of households in County Sligo making use of the HAP scheme has increased substantially from 2016 to 2019. The more than 300% increase in total households in the HAP scheme was fuelled by a net increase in households entering the scheme between 2016 and 2019 (despite the decrease in entrants from 2017 – 2019), with only 417 households exiting the scheme over the four-year period. The increase in households in the HAP scheme show an increased reliance on financial assistance provided by the local authority, and a demand for sufficient affordable housing for people with different income profiles.

3.2.3   Housing numbers

According to the 2016 Census the average household size in County Sligo was 2.56, a 0.04 decrease from the 2011 Census which recorded an average household size in the County of 2.6 persons. As shown in Table 3-5, the average household size has fallen significantly in County Sligo since 2002. However, at a National level 2016 saw a reverse to the long-term national trend with an increase from 2.73 to 2.75.

Table 3-5: Trends in household size in County Sligo - 2002, 2006, 2011 and 2016

	2002	2006	2011	2016
County Sligo	2.84	2.71	2.6	2.56
State	3.04	2.89	2.73	2.75

According to the 2017 Sligo County Development Plan[7], the housing need assessment of 2013 indicated that there were 770 households in Sligo on the social housing waiting list. Amendments to the 2017 housing strategy in 2020 based on vacancy trends indicated that approximately 2,162 persons would require social housing by 2023 equating to 865 households. Originally the County Development Plan estimated that the housing strategy would have to cater for circa 5,500 additional persons between 2017 and 2023, in order to comply with the population targets, set by the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010. The amended 2020 County Population projections, revised in accordance with the NPF, have now indicated that between 4,900 and 6,125 additional citizens may require accommodation by 2023. The original provision of land to cater for the increase in population has been deemed sufficient. In the Social Housing Assessment Summary,[8] Sligo recorded 501 households as qualifying for social housing support from the Local Authority in 2019, with this number increasing by 4.2% to 522 households in 2020 highlighting the increasing number of households requiring housing assistance.

According to the 2011 Census, 22.2% of County Sligo's permanent housing stock was vacant. This figure was a decrease from the 2006 Census with 23.1% but was above the national average of 14.5%. A total of 33,044 units were recorded in the 2011 housing stock, with 4,473 houses, 1,086 flats and 1,769 holiday homes vacant. By 2016, this figure had decreased to 20.1% and according to the Sligo 2021 Geodirectory, had further fallen to 6% vacancy with a housing stock of 35,019. Vacant buildings in 2021 accounted for a total of 2,131 buildings, consisting of 44 dwellings related to both residential and commercial use, 273 commercial dwellings and 1,814 residential dwellings.

3.2.4 House prices

Sligo's County Development Plan noted that house prices have decreased substantially since the economic recession of 2008. Furthermore, due to a prolonged period of uncertainty within the national property market, average house price estimation for Sligo was difficult. The Plan noted that quarterly residential property prices declined by -72.27% from €194,564 in 2010 to €112,942 in 2015.[9] However, this downward trend has changed since 2015, with median property prices increasing from €100,000 to €140,000 as recorded in the CSO's Characteristics of Residential Property Purchasers (CROPP)

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[7] Variation No.1 of Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023
[8] Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2020
[9] DRAFT Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023

dataset. This data also records insight into the type of individuals who are purchasing properties in Ireland across a range of themes such as price, age, income, gender, and location.

County level statistics for those able to purchase property indicate that the median age of property buyers has declined from 45 in 2016 to 41 in 2019, as shown in Figure 3-5. This decrease could potentially be attributed in part to the steady rise in median income, therefore enabling people to buy property at a younger age.
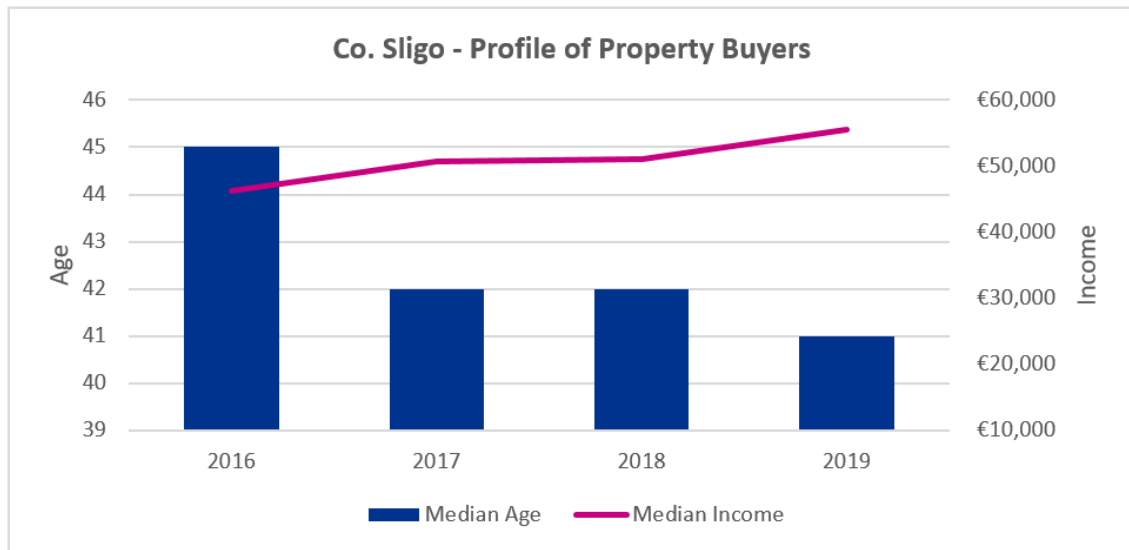
Figure 3-5: Profile of Property Buyers in County Sligo

While the median income of people in the County increased, the number of house sales also showed an overall increase (as seen in the linear trendline in Figure 3-6). The CROPP data suggests that the mean prices for filings in 2010 was €166,700 which decreased to €92,000 by 2013. However, by 2019 this figure had increased to €145,000. A similar trend is seen for Execution Transactions with the median house price increasing by 46% from 2016 to 2019.
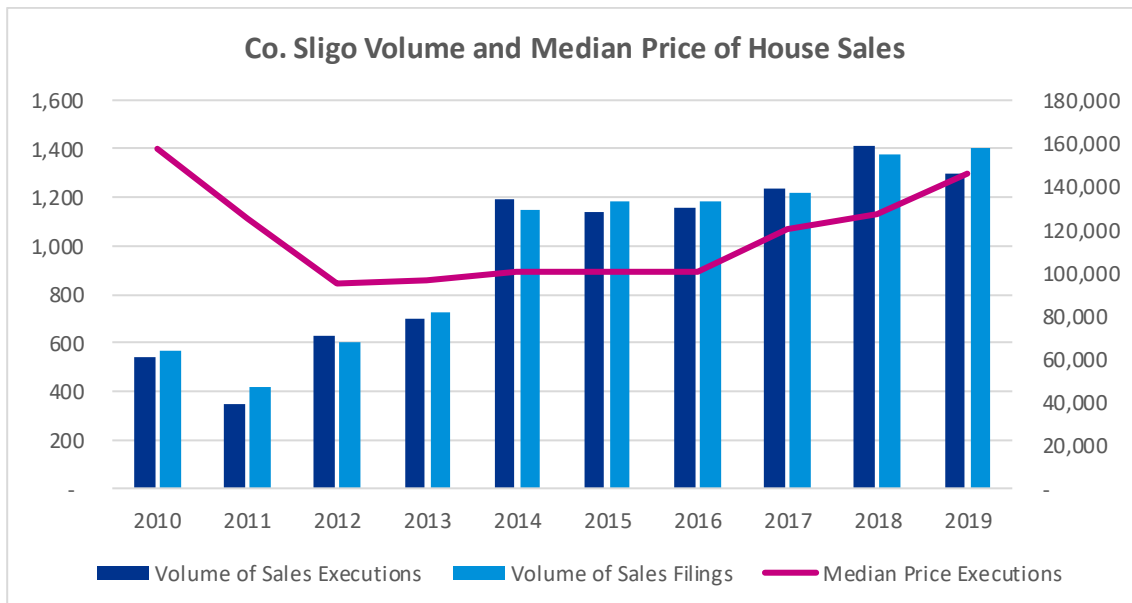
Figure 3-6: CROPP - Volume of Sales and Median Price of House Sales in County Sligo

As of August 2021, the border region has experienced the largest annual increase in house prices of 20.7%. This increase is 9.5% higher than the national average of 11.2%. The Border region is also 8.4% higher than Dublin City house prices which increased by 12.3% for the same period.

3.2.5 Housing for All initiative

With the publication of the *Housing for All* [10] report in August 2021, the Government has pledged to meet several national housing targets by 2030 including the need to construct an average of 33,000 homes per annum until 2030. These new dwellings will be of the highest standard and have an affordable price to meet the demand for tenures in all four housing groups of affordable, social, private rental and private ownership. The strategy provides four overarching pathways to achieve the objective of providing better housing facilities, with each pathway containing a comprehensive list of actions.

3.2.5.1 *Pathway 1: Supporting Homeownership and increased Affordability*

To meet the housing targets set out for additional households outlined in the National Planning Framework there is now a need to construct an average of 33,000 homes per annum until 2030. Under a €20Bn budget, a Framework for more sustainable housing will be implemented to meet the national housing needs. Under this framework housing will be made more affordable by launching a newly expanded Local Authority Home loan, extend rent pressure zone protection up to 2024 and introduce indefinite tenure for rent leases.

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[10] Housing for All available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ef5ec-housing-for-all-a-new-housing-plan-for-ireland/

3.2.5.2 Pathway 2: Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Social Housing Delivery and Supporting Social Inclusion

This second pathway aims to reinforce the Lisbon Declaration, signed in 2021 to end homelessness by 2030. *The Housing for All* plan aims to achieve this by assisting the most vulnerable members of the housing market and those who are homeless. The action items planned for this pathway are to provide more than 10,000 social homes yearly with an average of 9,500 new build social housing homes up to 2026. Under a new Housing First National Implementation Plan, 1,200 tenancies will be provided to those who have a history of homelessness or occupancy of emergency accommodation up to 2026. The plan will also aim to end long term leasing of social housing by Local Authorities through limiting of new entrants and creating new builds for social housing. This pathway will also target other vulnerable sections of the housing market such as improving the quality and number of Traveller specific accommodations.

3.2.5.3 Pathway 3: Increasing New Housing Supply

This pathway will specifically target increases in housing numbers and address how the Government will approach the provision of 33,000 new houses annually. The tasks involved in this pathway will consist of completing 10,000 social homes and 6,000 affordable homes for direct purchase or rent annually, with the remaining housing numbers targeted experiencing an updated and revaluated planning process to guarantee standardisation and ensure stability. In cooperation with National Planning Framework, there will be a stronger emphasis on the adequate supply of zoned land to meet local housing demand.

3.2.5.4 Pathway 4: Addressing Vacancy and Efficient Use of Existing Stock

This final pathway will address vacancy and efficient use of existing stock. To meet the direct demand for housing, the current vacant housing numbers must be examined. The reasons for vacancy can be quite complex and unique for every property within a local area. Vacancy also impacts potential growth in a settlement. It is therefore important that vacant properties are used efficiently. The first action in this pathway will be to collect data to better record the numbers of vacant buildings and to introduce a new Vacant Property Tax. The plan also pledges to help Local Authorities to purchase and resell up to 2,500 currently vacant properties. Where needed, compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers will be used. Finally, refurbishment will be incentivised through retrofit supports.

By implementing the *Housing for All* plan, the demand for housing can be better provided for with improved environmental, economic, and social sustainability, which will in turn help to guarantee better housing facilities in the years to 2030.

Figure 3-7: Housing for All Pathways

3.2.6 Levels of Education

At regional level, the number of pupils enrolled in different levels of education has increased from 2017 – 2020. The following tables provide an overview of the change in enrolment in primary level and secondary level education for Counties in the Border Region.

Table 3-6: Primary Level Education Enrolment

	Sligo	Cavan	Donegal	Leitrim	Monaghan	Border Region
2017	7,594	9,948	19,053	3,660	7,694	47,949
2020	7,700	10,181	18,789	3,723	7,922	48,315
Change in enrolment (2017-2020)	1.4%	2.3%	-1.4%	1.7%	3.0%	0.8%
% of Border Region (2017)	15.8%	20.7%	39.7%	7.6%	16.0%	
% of Border Region (2020)	15.9%	21.1%	38.9%	7.7%	16.4%	

Table 3-7: Secondary Level Education Enrolment

	Sligo	Cavan	Donegal	Leitrim	Monaghan	Border Region
2017	4,787	5,202	12,969	2,542	5,356	30,856

2020	5,175	5,701	13,167	2,681	5,415	32,139
Change in enrolment (2017-2020)	8.1%	9.6%	1.5%	5.5%	1.1%	4.2%
% of Border Region (2017)	15.5%	16.9%	42.0%	8.2%	17.4%	
% of Border Region (2020)	16.1%	17.7%	41.0%	8.3%	16.8%	

The increase in primary level education for pupils in County Sligo from 2017 to 2020 placed the County at fourth highest increase in the region. In turn, the increase in pupils enrolled in secondary level education was second highest in the region at 8.1%, making up 16.1% of all secondary level enrolment in the region. The overall increase in enrolment in primary and secondary level education from 2017 to 2020 is further supported by the recorded inflow of persons to County Sligo for education in 2016 (see Section 3.5).

The following figure shows the level of educational attainment by permanent residents in the County aged 15 years and older (2016 Census).
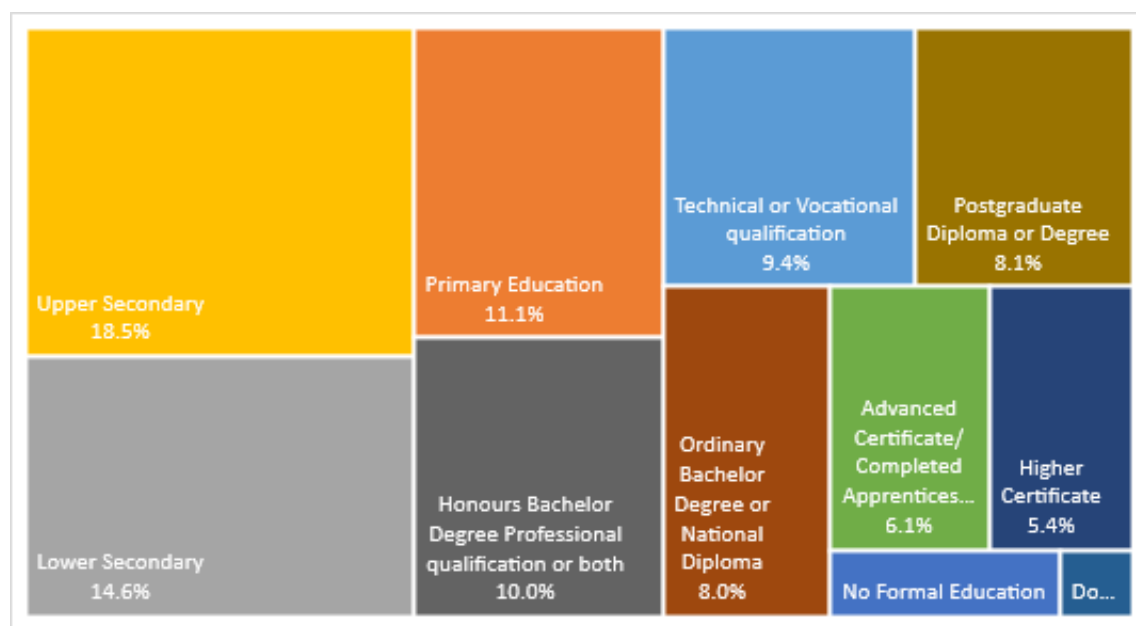
Figure 3-8: Educational Attainment of People in County Sligo (2016)

According to Census 2016 statistics at County level, 47.7% of residents in the area aged 15 years and older hold some form of Third Level qualification (i.e. NQF 6, Advanced Certificate or higher), which is higher than the national average of 42%. A further 18.5% have achieved upper secondary school qualifications. As also reflected in the following figure, the general level of education (of people aged 15 and older) in the study area has increased, with a sharp decline in people having less than primary or solely up to leaving certificate qualifications, and an increase in the number of people with third level or higher qualifications. Particularly, the number of females with masters or higher degrees increased significantly (24%) while the number of females with solely primary

or lower certification decreased by 16%. Prior to COIVD-19 Sligo Technological University recorded 4,500 students attending courses. Figure 3-26 displays the locations of Education Centre's in Co. Sligo.

Figure 3-9: Change in the Level of Educational Attainment of People in County Sligo
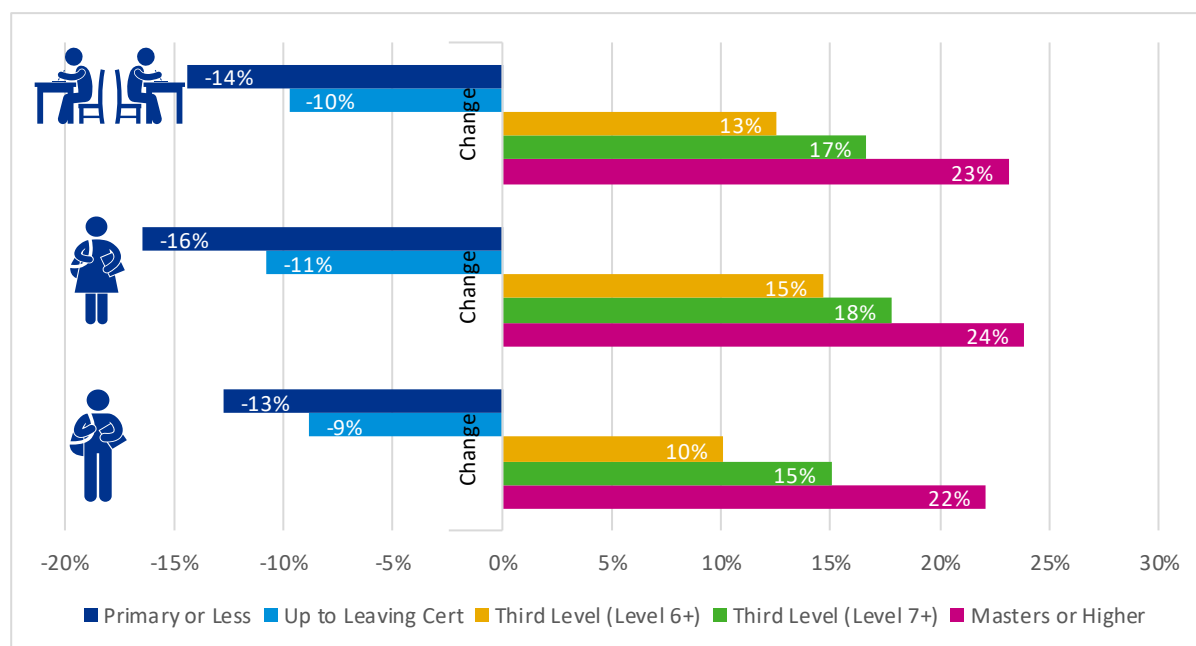
3.3 Theme 2: Economy and Employment

The Principal Economic Status of study area residents aged 15 years or older is used to assess the level of economically active or inactive population. Persons or groups over 15 years of age not participating in the labour force are typically students, home makers, retirees, and persons unable to work due to illness or disability and thus, are not considered to be economically active. The following table provides an overview of the labour force in the study area.

Table 3-8: Principal Economic Status of Persons in County Sligo, Sligo Town, and the State

Principal Economic Status	County Sligo				Sligo Town		State
	2011	2016	Change	2016%	Change	2016%	2016%
At work	25,434	26,002	2.2%	50%	1.3%	47%	53%
Looking for first regular job	427	438	2.6%	1%	1.4%	1%	1%
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job	5,197	3,812	-26.6%	7%	-21.4%	8%	7%
Student	6,620	6,333	-4.3%	12%	-12.0%	14%	11%
Looking after home/family	4,140	3,599	-13.1%	7%	-12.6%	6%	8%

Principal Economic Status		County Sligo				Sligo Town		State
Retired	7,666	9,230	20.4%	18%		21.7%	19%	15%
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	2,627	2,547	-3.0%	5%		-6.7%	5%	4%
Other	173	261	50.9%	0.5%		105.7%	0.8%	0.4%
Total	52,284	52,222						

The number of unemployed people in the County decreased by 26.6% in the intercensal period, accounting for 7% of the working age population. This is in line with State figures, although unemployment in Sligo Town is slightly higher at 8%. The number of retirees increased by 20.4% at County level and 21.7% Town level respectively, making up the largest portion of the not economically active population. This accounts for 18% and 19% respectively of all persons aged 15 years and older, which is considerably higher than the national figure of 15%. Despite the decline of 4.3%, students overall are third highest in the age group classification behind retirees and people at work. Notably, the number of people primarily looking after their home or family decreased by approximately 13% at County and Town level. The following graphics illustrate the percentage of the resident working population by industry at County and Town level (as recorded in Census 2016).

Public administration
County: 7%
Town: 8%

Manufacturing Industries
County: 13%
Town: 12%

Transport and Communications
County: 5%
Town: 5%

Professional Services
County: 28%
Town: 30%

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing
County: 7%
Town: 1%

Commerce and Trade
County: 19%
Town: 20%

Building and Construction
County: 4%
Town: 3%

Other
County: 17%
Town: 21%

At County level, the most significant change in employment per industry was the decrease of employment in Commerce and Trade (-1.1%) and growth of employment in Professional Services (1.8%). In turn, changes in employment per industry at Town level were marked by a decrease in employment in Manufacturing Industries (-1.2%) and an increase of 0.8% in employment in Professional Services. Both County (0.7%) and Town (1.3%) levels recorded an increase in employment in other services not yet recorded in the Census.

To identify the key sectors within the county, the European Traded Clusters[11] observatory report highlights the commercial Location Quotients (LQ) for the Northern and Western Region. These Quotients offer a single access point for statistical information, analysis and mapping of industrial clusters. It is an initiative that aims at promoting the development of regional industry in Europe, with a view to encouraging competitiveness and entrepreneurship in emerging industries and facilitating access to shared resources and activities. The ultimate objective is to help EU member regions in designing smart specialisation to assist companies in developing competitive advantages in emerging industries. Using the GeoDirectory commercial database and the Observatory's definitions of "Traded Clusters" the sectors which are strongly specialised within Sligo were identified. The LQ index acts as a method in quantifying the level of specificity within the regional economy relative to the national norm. An LQ score greater than 1.0 indicates a region that has an above average proportion of commercial units involved in a cluster relative to the national norm. If the score is greater than 1.25, the region contains a specialised cluster. An LQ score between 0.75 and 0.99 represents a below average proportion of commercial units. An LQ score less than 0.75 shows a weak specialism. Sligo contains a strong specialism in ten industries ranging from Environmental Services scoring a value of 1.3 to Medical Device Production and Vulcanized and Fired Materials scoring a value of 3.0. Also included in the County's specialisms are Hospitality and Tourism sectors with 1.3, Performing Arts at 1.7 and production of raw materials such as Plastics, Paper and Packaging recording a value of 2.2. A number of technology sectors are also recorded in the County's specialisms with Metalworking Technology containing a LQ index of 1.5 and Heavy Machinery Technology with a 2.3 LQ score.

When looking at employment levels within enterprises in County Sligo, a slight decrease in overall employment is noted between 2015 and 2019, as presented in Table 3-9.

Table 3-9: County Sligo Employment by Enterprise

Employment in Enterprises by Category	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Change from 2015-2019
Accommodation and food service activities	2,285	2,322	2,467	2,463	2,633	15.2%
Administrative and support service activities	367	386	421	487	545	48.5%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	229	240	239	271	310	35.4%
Business economy excluding activities of holding companies	12,722	13,233	13,888	14,670	11,885	-6.6%
Construction	598	668	784	896	986	64.9%
Education	972	1,021	1,054	1,094	1,257	29.3%
Financial and insurance activities excluding activities of holding companies	112	119	128	139	152	35.7%
Human Health and Social Work Activities	1,854	2,045	2,140	2,206	2,297	23.9%
ICT total	201	236	215	226	234	16.4%
Information and communication	259	274	253	285	295	13.9%

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[11] Methodology and Findings Report for a Cluster Mapping of Related Sectors

Employment in Enterprises by Category	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Change from 2015-2019
Manufacturing*	5,324	5,548	5,782	6,177	2,864	-46.2%
Other Service Activities	501	506	518	513	541	8.0%
Professional, scientific, and technical activities	813	845	934	981	1,015	24.8%
Real estate activities	104	114	124	120	120	15.4%
Transportation and storage	442	445	438	474	540	22.2%
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	13**	11	16	14	14**	7.7%
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	2,399	2,494	2,535	2,629	2,719	13.3%
Total	29,182	30,507	31,936	33,645	28,393	-2.7%

* Note: The CSO has clarified that based on profiling completed since the release of 2019 data in 2021, several manufacturing enterprises have been re-designated causing the large decrease in 2019 figures. This re-designation has also impacted annual total figures and will be revised by the CSO in 2022.

** Note: Data point carried over from prior year

As is evident from the table above and reflecting the change in resident employment characteristics, employment in professional services such as administrative and support service activities, financial and insurance activities, and professional, scientific, and technical activities showed strong increases. Apart from the decrease in employment in the business economy industries, employment in all other industries increased over the five-year period to 2019. The National Planning Framework projects by 2040 an additional 12,000 jobs will be created throughout the county, the largest projection coming from local enterprise to generate 6,000 additional roles. This will also include the Tourism & Hospitality sector where an increase of 1,600 additional jobs is projected by 2040.

Employment in enterprises at Border Region level increased substantially (19.2%) between 2015 and 2019 with large increases in employment in Counties Monaghan (28.3%) and Donegal (24.4%) as presented in Table 3-10. Sligo has been comparatively successful in attracting FDI, with over 2,351 people employed through IDA client companies in 2020.[12]

Table 3-10: Border Region Employment by Enterprise

Employment in Enterprises by County	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Change from 2015-2019
*Co. Sligo	29,182	30,507	31,936	33,645	28,393	-2.7%
Co. Leitrim	10,920	11,457	11,560	12,015	12,482	14.3%
Co. Monaghan	30,572	32,072	31,966	35,391	39,229	28.3%
Co. Donegal	60,149	64,509	67,817	68,790	74,842	24.4%

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[12] Figures supplied by IDA.

Co. Cavan	29,087	30,925	32,684	34,075	35,714	22.8%
Border Region	**159,910**	**169,470**	**175,963**	**183,916**	**190,660**	**19.2%**

*Note: The CSO has clarified that based on profiling completed since the release of 2019 data in 2021, several manufacturing enterprises have been re-designated causing a large decrease in 2019 figures that has also affected the percentage change from 2015 to 2019. This will be revised by the CSO in 2022.

The following table presents the level of employment of those employed at County and Town level.

Table 3-11: Level of Employment in Sligo County and Town

	% Persons County Sligo				% Persons Sligo Town			
	2011	Summary	2016	Summary	2011	Summary	2016	Summary
A Employers and managers	13%	31%	13%	32%	14%	34%	14%	36%
B Higher professional	6%		7%		9%		9%	
C Lower professional	11%		12%		12%		14%	
D Non-manual	18%	45%	18%	44%	20%	44%	21%	44%
E Manual skilled	10%		9%		8%		7%	
F Semi-skilled	9%		8%		9%		9%	
G Unskilled	3%		3%		3%		4%	
H Own account workers	6%		5%		4%		4%	
I Farmers	8%	25%	9%	24%	1%	22%	2%	20%
J Agricultural workers	0.5%		0.3%		0.2%		0.2%	
Z All others gainfully occupied / unknown	16%		15%		20%		18%	
Total	100%		100%		100%		100%	

As seen in the table above, and the figure below, the level of employment in professional, skilled, and manual labour changed between 2011 and 2016. The change notes a move away from agriculture, semi-skilled and manual labour toward more non-manual, lower and higher professional and managerial employment levels.
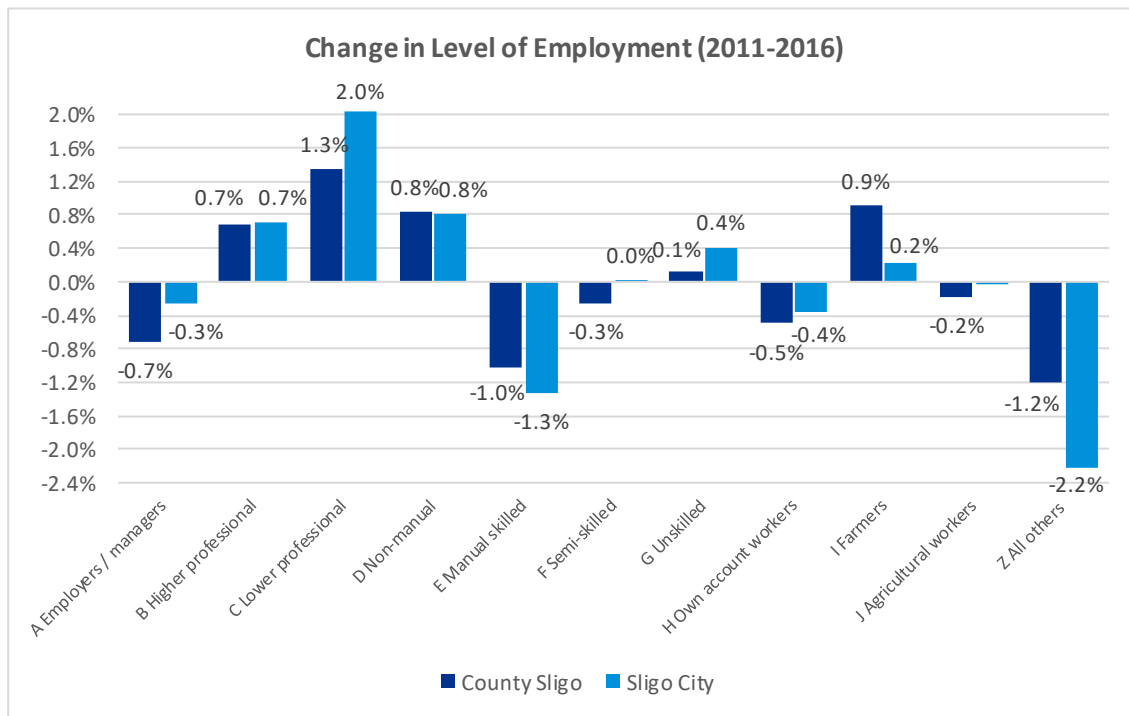
Figure 3-10: Change in Level of Employment

The employment and labour force numbers stayed within similar levels throughout the quarters of the years shown in Table 3-12, besides a slight dip in Q2 2020. Unemployment stayed consistently low with the highest numbers being in Q3 2020 with over 12,000 people unemployed at a rate of 6.9%, in line with the impacts of COVID-19 during that period.

Table 3-12: Border Region Employment and Labour Force Statistics (Q4 2018 - Q4 2020)

	Q4 18	Q3 19	Q4 19	Q1 20	Q2 20	Q3 20	Q4 20
In employment ('000)	177.7	176.7	183.9	177.4	159.9	169.5	178.9
Unemployed ('000)	6.9	10.1	7.3	10.3	8.7	12.5	7.9
In labour force ('000)	184.6	186.8	191.2	187.7	168.6	182	186.8
Unemployment rate (%) (Persons aged 15-74)	3.8	5.4	3.9	5.5	5.2	6.9	4.2
Participation rate (%)	58.1	58.1	59.3	58.1	52.2	56.2	57.4

Figure 3-11 also shows that the mean average employment participation rate is around 58% with the lowest being at 52.2% in Q2 2020.
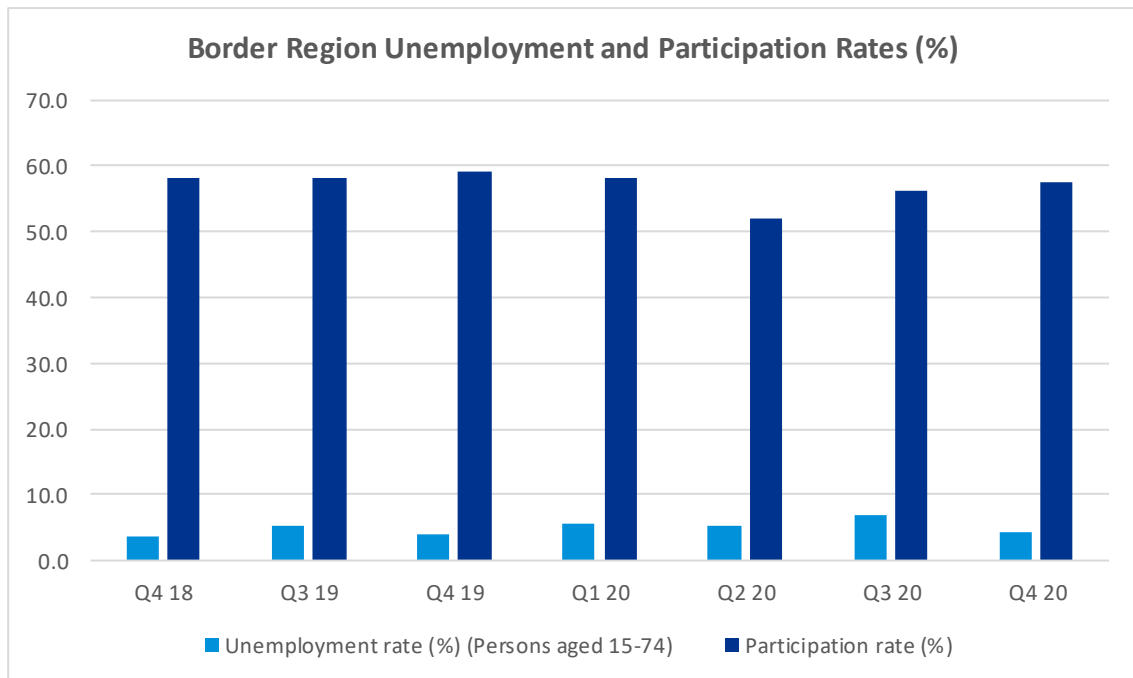
Figure 3-11: Border Region Unemployment and Participation Rates

Between 2011 and 2012, unemployment rates were at their highest, but throughout further years the rate gradually decreased until a low point in 2019, at an average of 4.2%. The unemployment rate under the male population was substantially higher between 2010 and 2016, although the unemployment gap between genders decreased toward 2019 and 2020, as seen in Figure 3-12. Another increase in unemployment was noted in 2020, reaching 6.9% in Q3, which points to the effects of COVID-19 on business operations and employment in various industries.
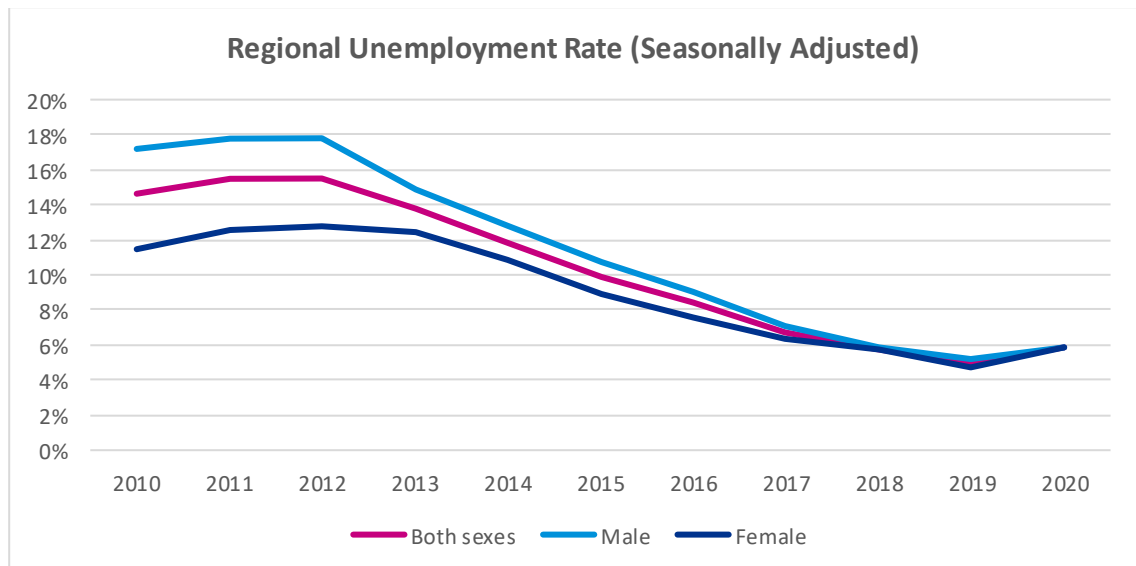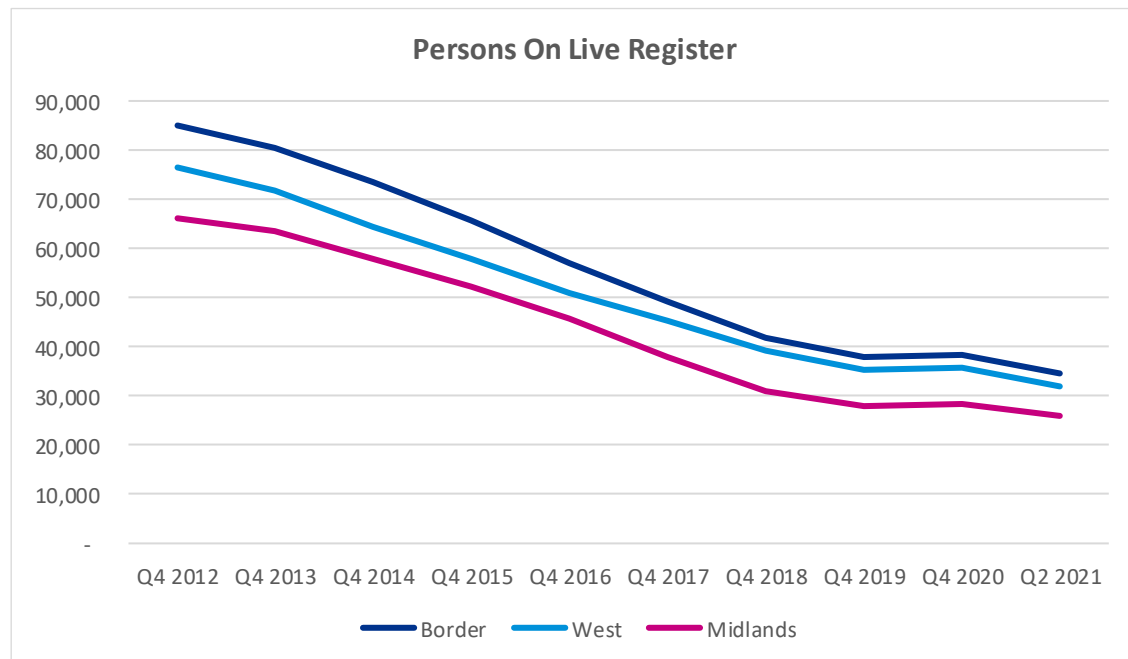

Figure 3-12: Border Region Unemployment Rate (Seasonally Adjusted)

The Live Register, administered by the Department of Social Protection, measures part-time workers, seasonal workers, and casual workers who are entitled to Jobseekers Benefit (JB) and Jobseekers Allowance (JA). Table 3-13 presents Live Register data for the Border Region, surrounding regions, and at State level.

Table 3-13: Average number of Persons on Live Register (Region and State)

	Border	West	Midlands	State
Q4 2012	85,009	76,465	66,134	840,225
Q4 2013	80,447	71,693	63,508	788,195
Q4 2014	73,540	64,483	57,789	710,875
Q4 2015	65,589	57,757	52,433	638,823
Q4 2016	57,035	51,015	45,657	550,981
Q4 2017	49,085	45,115	37,867	470,646
Q4 2018	41,921	39,084	30,953	396,785
Q4 2019	38,026	35,187	27,909	360,006
Q4 2020	38,126	35,872	28,467	391,393
Q2 2021	34,570	31,936	25,931	349,966

As seen in the table and in Figure 3-13 below, the number of people on the live register has consistently decreased from 2012 to 2019, followed by a slight increase in 2020.

Figure 3-13: Persons on Live Register (By Region)

In line with the decrease in unemployment in County Sligo, the number of people on the Live Register in the Border region decreased by 55% from 2012 to 2019 and a further reduction of 9% from 2019 to 2021 (June) despite the slight increase in 2020. In comparison to other regions, the Border Region had the second largest reduction from

2019 to 2021, exceeding that of the West region (54% reduction), with the State level reduction at 57%.

3.3.1 The Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many new challenges to daily life since the first lockdown when restrictions were implemented in March 2020 in Ireland. The following subsection provides an overview of data available at regional and national level, depicting the impact that the pandemic restrictions have had on various aspects of peoples' lives.

As part of the Labour Force Survey in Q2 2020[13], during the initial phase of lockdown restrictions, the CSO conducted an analysis of the impacts of restrictions on employment, household finances, work environment, and emotional wellbeing. In a separate analysis conducted at national level in August 2020[14], several work-life challenges and changes experienced by surveyed individuals during the pandemic were identified.

The following table provides an overview of the recorded impact[15] of COVID-19 on employment and working life.

Table 3-14: Expected Impacts of COVID-19 on Employment and Work-life Balance

Lockdown (March-June 2020)	Re-emergence (July 2020 - December 2021)	Recovery (2022-2025)
Severe Impact	Moderate Impact	Minor/Positive Impact
Employment Levels	Employment Levels	Employment Levels
The lockdown has seen many Irish firms forced to reduce staff levels, increasing unemployment in Northern Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (RoI). The hospitality and retail sections in particular have been hardest hit as consumers spend more time at home, order items online more and socialise less.	Employment levels slowly recover as lockdown restrictions ease, seeing more firms able to re-hire staff. However, the complications of a second wave of COVID-19 could see a further lockdown, and in turn a further contraction of the workforce overall. Incomes will be squeezed further and see Irish consumers limit their spending, in turn limiting the scope for expansion by employers.	Once the income squeeze lifts and as wariness regarding exposure to COVID-19 subsides, the economy will begin to recover and see more firms seeking to hire staff, again improving employment levels in both NI and RoI.
Working Life	Working Life	Working Life

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[13] Results are based on a sample of persons aged 15 and over from weeks 1 and 2 of the Q2 2020 Labour Force Survey Note: The survey allowed for multiple responses to the question relating to life effects due to COVID19 for this reason percentages will not add to 100%

[14] O'Connor, B. (2020) The Working Life – Ireland – September 2020. Published by the Mintel Group Ltd. www.mintel.com

[15] Base: 445 Northern Ireland and 909 Republic of Ireland internet users aged 16+ who are working.

Lockdown (March-June 2020)	Re-emergence (July 2020 - December 2021)	Recovery (2022-2025)
Severe Impact	Moderate Impact	Minor/Positive Impact
A large portion of the Irish workforce are forced to work remotely causing issues for many, with over half of Irish workers claiming COVID-19 has disrupted their work-life balance. On the other hand, 15% of Irish workers in May 2020 note they or someone in their household have been put on furlough.	Irish workers adapt to new ways of working with a global survey by Workvivo (September 2020) finding that 85% of employees have responded positively towards remote home working. With lockdown restrictions easing more workers return to their place of work, but increased virus cases are likely to see more prefer to continue working remotely for the foreseeable future.	As fears regarding COVID-19 subside, more workers will return to work, while many Irish firms will implement more flexible work policies allowing for more remote working, which in turn could help more workers achieve a good work-life balance.

Source: Mintel Group Ltd.

Following the initial lockdown and restriction of business and movement, a study (conducted by the CSO) indicated that approximately 30% of people[16] started working remotely, with 8% increasing their usual remote working hours. Figure 3-14 provides further detail.
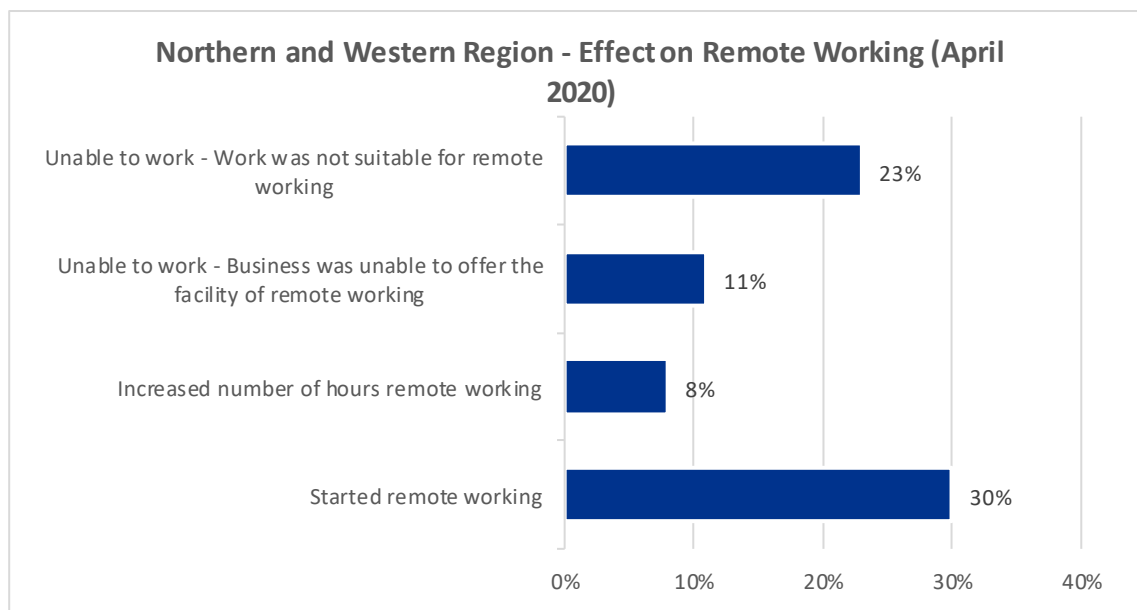

Figure 3-14: Northern and Western Region - Effect on Remote Working

In comparison to the 38% of people who were working remotely at this time, 34% of people were unable to work due to their business not being able to facilitate remote working (11%) or their type of work not being suitable for remote working (23%). Further statistics show similar trends for the Southern and Eastern and Midland regions, where 29% and 39% (respectively) of people started remote working. Furthermore, 15% of people increased their remote working hours in the Eastern and Midland region. In

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[16] Remote working of persons aged 15 years and over, as captured in the Q2 2020 Labour Force Survey

addition to those not able to work remotely, it was recorded that 8% of people in the Northern and Western Region had to take unpaid leave, compared to 9% and 7% of people in the Southern and Eastern and Midland regions, respectively. In a subsequent online survey (August 2020), it was found that 18% of respondents in Ireland worked from home before COVID-19 (16% in NI), which increased substantially to 54% during the pandemic (48% in NI). 70% of respondents also noted that they expect to continue working from home more frequently in the future, due to the change in work environments brought on by COVID-19.

As shown in Table 3-15, it was recorded that the impact of restrictions in April 2020 led to loss of employment and temporary layoffs across all regions, highest of which was in the Southern region.

Table 3-15: Regional Effect on Employment of COVID-19 (CSO)

Region	Effect	Percentage
Northern and Western	Loss of employment	14%
	Temporary layoff	35%
Southern	Loss of employment	16%
	Temporary layoff	38%
Eastern and Midland	Loss of employment	13%
	Temporary layoff	31%

The difficulties that COVID-19 restrictions and rules placed on people and communities had a resultant effect on wealth and personal finances, with 18% of people in the Northern and Western region indicating they worried about their personal finances, while 4% were unable to pay regular bills, and 2% not being able to pay rent or mortgage. Similar adverse effects were recorded in the Southern region, where 17% of people had money worries, 6% had to defer bills, and 3% were not able to pay their rent or mortgage.

Apart from the employment and financial challenges faced, the pandemic has had an impact on emotional wellbeing and family life as well. A CSO survey (April 2020) recorded that approximately a quarter of respondents were feeling alone and isolated, while nearly 20% had to care for additional dependent family or friends. Further statistics, as presented in Figure 3-15, show respondents' hesitance to going shopping, and making more contact with people through online means as opposed to in-person.

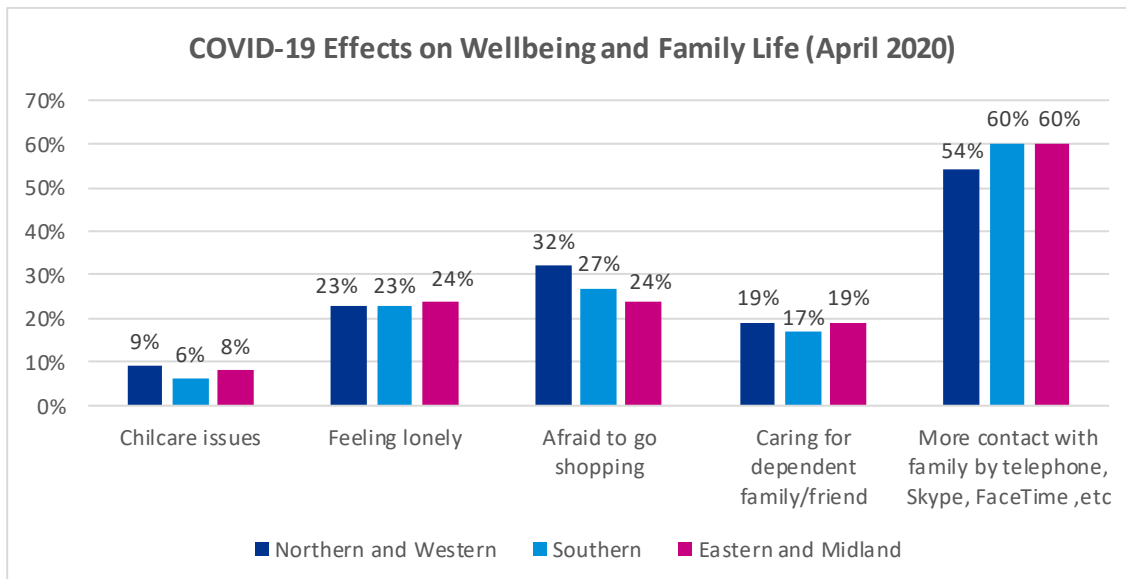**COVID-19 Effects on Wellbeing and Family Life (April 2020)**

Figure 3-15: COVID-19 Effects on Wellbeing and Family Life

Although an online study in August 2020 found that 68% of working respondents across Ireland believed they had a healthy work-life balance, 56% admitted that the pandemic's lockdown and restrictions have disturbed this balance. More than half of respondents noted that they regularly work more than their contracted working hours (52%) and often check their work emails outside of contracted working hours (54%). The increase in employment, financial and emotional pressures brought on by COVID-19 were also evident through respondents' claims of not getting enough sleep (43%), having time for other hobbies and interests (41%) or exercise (48%) during a workday.

The impact of COVID-19 has necessitated the facilitation of remote working for employees across many different industries. A study conducted in July 2021 [17] developed a remote working index to determine which town or city provides the best conditions for working from home. The study considered a variety of factors, such as average property prices, access to 5G broadband, local crime rates and the number of local restaurants, General Practitioner (GP) access, food delivery services and the number of top local schools.

As seen in Table 3-16, Sligo was ranked the overall best place to work from home in Ireland, with particularly high ranking for affordable housing, access to a high number of GPs and several schools in the area.

Table 3-16: Best Place to Work from Home in Ireland (Source: Switcher.ie)

Rank	Town / Town	County	Total Score	Avg House Price	5G	Crime / 1000 People	Restaurants / 1000 People	GPs / 1000 People	Food Delivery Services	Top Schools / 1000 Population	Coffee Shops / 1000 People
1	Sligo	Sligo	4.93	€ 162,793	2	68.545	5.209	5.157	2	0.208	1.875

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[17] The Best Place to Work from Home in Ireland, Switcher.ie. Available at: https://switcher.ie/mortgages/best-locations-work-from-home/

2	Galway	Galway	4.77	€ 287,494	3	41.484	4.729	1.739	3	0.075	1.339
3	Ballina	Mayo	4.64	€ 143,483	2	43.26	4.424	3.245	1	0.197	0.885

3.4 Theme 3: Spatial Context

3.4.1 Spatial Context & Infrastructural Facilities

The future development of Sligo needs to respond to opportunities, constraints, and pressures throughout the catchment areas of Sligo Town and supporting towns. The Sligo 2030 plan seeks to promote an urban and rural structure that reinforces the role of regional growth centres that generate economic and community development in the town, county and rural context. The role of Sligo County and Sligo Town will be investigated and assessed for maximum realisation of its strengths and potential as a centre for growth, and its impact on the wider region, underpinned by a network of smaller towns that assist in the provision of regionally strategic economic development.

The co-ordinated delivery of public and social infrastructure enables the development of a sustainable economy and socially inclusive communities. Such infrastructure includes ICT assets, housing, transport, commercial space, and social amenities provided at Town and County levels utilising the best available technologies and practices. Development of 'smart' connectivity, ICT access, and supporting ICT infrastructure will attract further investment, and enable efficient communication and engagement between different stakeholder levels as envisaged in the Sligo Digital Strategy 2020-2023.

3.4.2 Urban/Rural Comparison

Outlined in the Ireland 2040 plan, development in rural areas will be improved through the Action Plan for Rural Development[18], published in 2018 this framework was created to focus on the improvement of transport infrastructure in rural communities.

Its key deliverables are:
— Supporting 135,000 new jobs by 2020
— Increase oversea visitors by 12%
— Invest €50 million in sport, recreation, and cultural facilities
— Revitalise 600+ towns and villages
— Protect important local services
— ensure all homes and businesses are connected to Broadband
— Support 4000 new community projects

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[18] Realising our Rural Potential, Action Plan for Rural Development

A rural area defined by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) is an area outside of a settlement which contains a population of more than 1,500. Settlements with fewer than this population are considered within this rural definition. More than 20% of the national population live within a rural settlement with a further 37% living in individual dwellings in the countryside. From the 2016 Census, County Sligo recorded a rural population of 54.6% from its 81 Electoral Divisions living outside of its 25 settlements, 18 of the County's settlements contain a population of less than 1,500.

The Ireland 2040 plan aims at reinforcing the action plan deliverables by encouraging growth and mitigating decline in areas that have experienced recent low population growth or decline. The National Policy seeks to strengthen and diversify rural towns by regenerating derelict sites and implementing new technology. The national plan will also seek to sustainably lower carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency in rural areas, with better digital connectivity through the National Broadband Plan enabling increased home working for residents in rural areas throughout Sligo County.
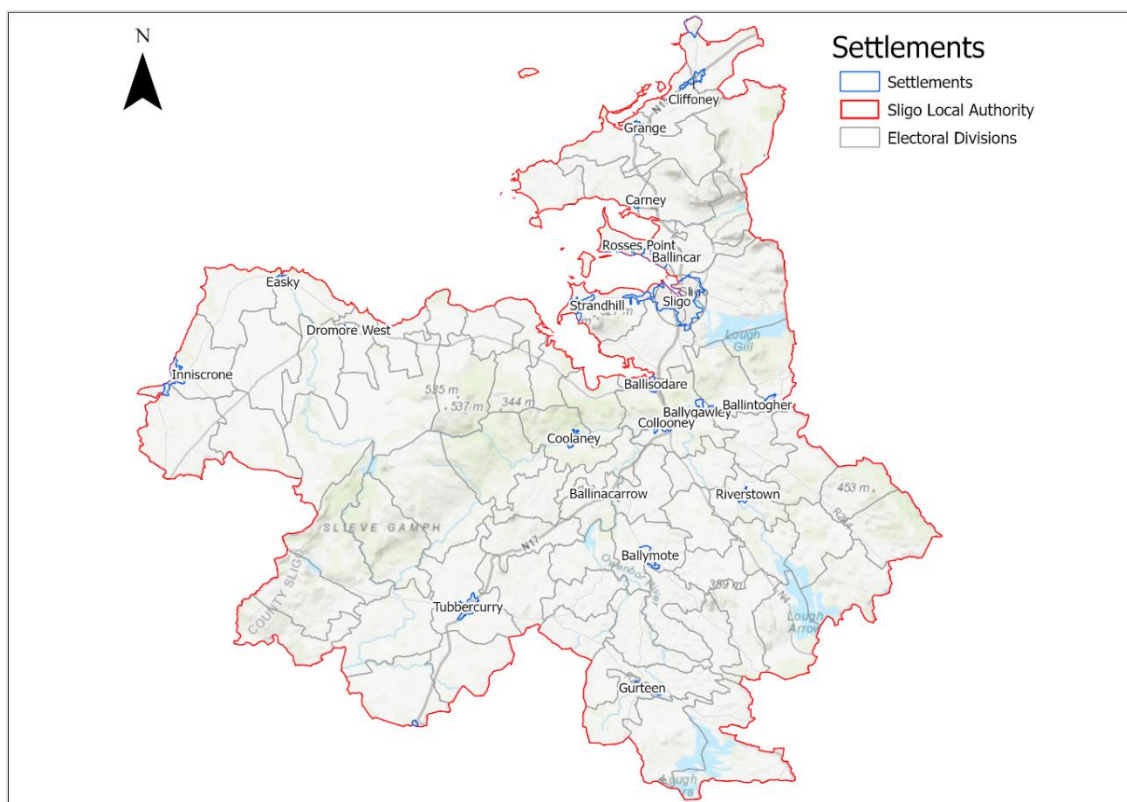

Figure 3-16: Settlement Boundary and ED Delineation in County Sligo

3.4.3   Spatial Community Development

This section of the report reviews the provision of key infrastructural facilities necessary for community development and highlights facilities which are of high

priority. These facilities will be key for Sligo moving forward as it aims to meet development objectives as set out in the NWRA Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032 document. Social infrastructure includes a wide range of services and facilities that contribute to quality of life and are a key part of the fabric of an area, not just in terms of wellbeing, but also in terms of sense of place and being a part of the local identity. For the purpose of this report, the array of services and facilities defined as social infrastructure have been categorised into the following typologies:

- **Amenities:** Medical facilities, childcare facilities, emergency facilities, parking, and recycling.
- **Leisure:** Family recreation facilities, sporting locations, natural reserve areas
- **Other Facilities:** Tourist attractions, accommodation and activities, and renewable energy areas.

Methodology

The following analysis was undertaken using a desktop approach which used the records of several commercial and open-source data records. Settlement locations were based off the OSi Settlement Boundary dataset with a 2 km buffer zone applied around the settlement boundary to ensure inclusion of facilities which may be located on the periphery of the settlement. The objective of this study is to identify the main facilities of each category within Sligo's Settlement Hierarchy. Please note this study is not an assessment of all facilities within the County Development Plan but rather a high-level approach to gather insight of the main facilities which are provided within each category.

Table 3-17: Settlement Hierarchy

Settlement Category	Amenity	Leisure	Other facilities	Total
Regional Growth Centre	47.9%	34.8%	17.3%	503
Satellites	29.8%	51.9%	18.3%	104
Support Towns	31.5%	51.8%	16.8%	197
Villages	50.6%	26.3%	23.1%	156

Regional Growth Centre

The largest area for the provision of amenities was Sligo Town, with 503 social infrastructure facilities identified, constituting 47.9% of the total infrastructure in the County. The Town offers quite a lot of social outlets, with 20% of amenities being made up of pubs, restaurants, cafes, and fast-food outlets. A number of car parking and bicycle facilities are also recorded in this category. The Town is supplied with a strong health amenity network with 27 general practitioners and medical centres being recorded alongside 3 hospitals. A total of 10 childcare facilities were also identified within the settlement boundary. A total of 175 leisure facilities were identified with 14 swimming pool facilities provided by private and public sources, 58 playing fields and 92 green spaces in the Town.

Other facilities included tourist accommodation, with 15 Fáilte Ireland registered hotels, and a total of 62 tourist activities and 10 attractions identified from the Fáilte Ireland database.

Satellites

Urban areas of the County within the Environs of Sligo Town that have been designated as Satellites towns consist of the towns of Ballysadare, Collooney, Grange, Coolaney and Strandhill. 64 facilities were recorded in these towns, with leisure facilities recorded as the largest category consisting of 7 recorded Parks, 5 playgrounds and 10 pitches, with the North Sligo Sports Centre located in Strandhill.

Support Towns

The Support Towns of Tubbercurry, Inniscrone and Ballymote provided the third highest number of amenities with 31.5%. All three support towns recorded facilities for vital services, such as fire services, that serve a wide catchment area. A community centre was also located in both Tubbercurry and Ballymote. Childcare facilities were also recorded in all 3 Support towns along with a high number of social amenities such as pubs and restaurants.

Inniscrone provided the most leisure facilities with 61 facilities consisting of green spaces and playing fields. All 3 towns also contained sport centres, with Inniscrone providing a leisure centre for indoor water sports. These towns also provided a range of accommodation facilities with Tubbercurry and Ballymote containing 3 each and Inniscrone containing 8. Due to Inniscrone being situated on the coast, it recorded 13 activities and attractions, while in comparison Tubbercurry and Ballymote provided 5 each.

Villages that sustain rural Communities

The remaining villages of Ballygawley, Ballinacarrow, Rosses Point, Easky, Ballintogher, Cliffoney, Gurteen Mullaghmore, and Dromore West recorded a total of 162 social infrastructure facilities and the second highest number of amenities with 50%. The analysis identified a strong focus on infrastructural amenities such as parking which influenced the amenity percentage. The villages of Dromore West, Rosses Point, Cliffoney and Easky all recorded a community centre within their settlement boundaries. Social amenities within these settlements are mainly focused around restaurants. The main leisure facilities recorded consisted of 35 green spaces and 6 facilities for camping. However, only the villages of Ballygawley, Gurteen and Rosses Point recorded facilities for tourist attractions. A major leisure facility which was recorded was the golf course in Ballygawley. This settlement also consisted of a high number of social facilities such as bars and restaurants, while a number of parking facilities were identified in the villages of Ballisodare, Collooney and Grange.

3.4.4 Planning Pipeline

Sligo Local Authority contains a range of Online Planning tools which provide information on current and proposed pipeline developments within the planning

process. Spatial and temporal data is presented within an online mapping application which allows stakeholders to view and interpret freely accessible information.

3.4.4.1 Residential Planning Pipeline

The residential planning database for February 2021 consisted of 30 planned residential developments. Sligo Town consisted of 8 developments while the townlands of Ballisodare and Inniscrone each recorded 3 planned developments. The settlements of Ballintogher, Ballymote, Collooney, Coolaney and Strandhill all recorded two planning developments each.
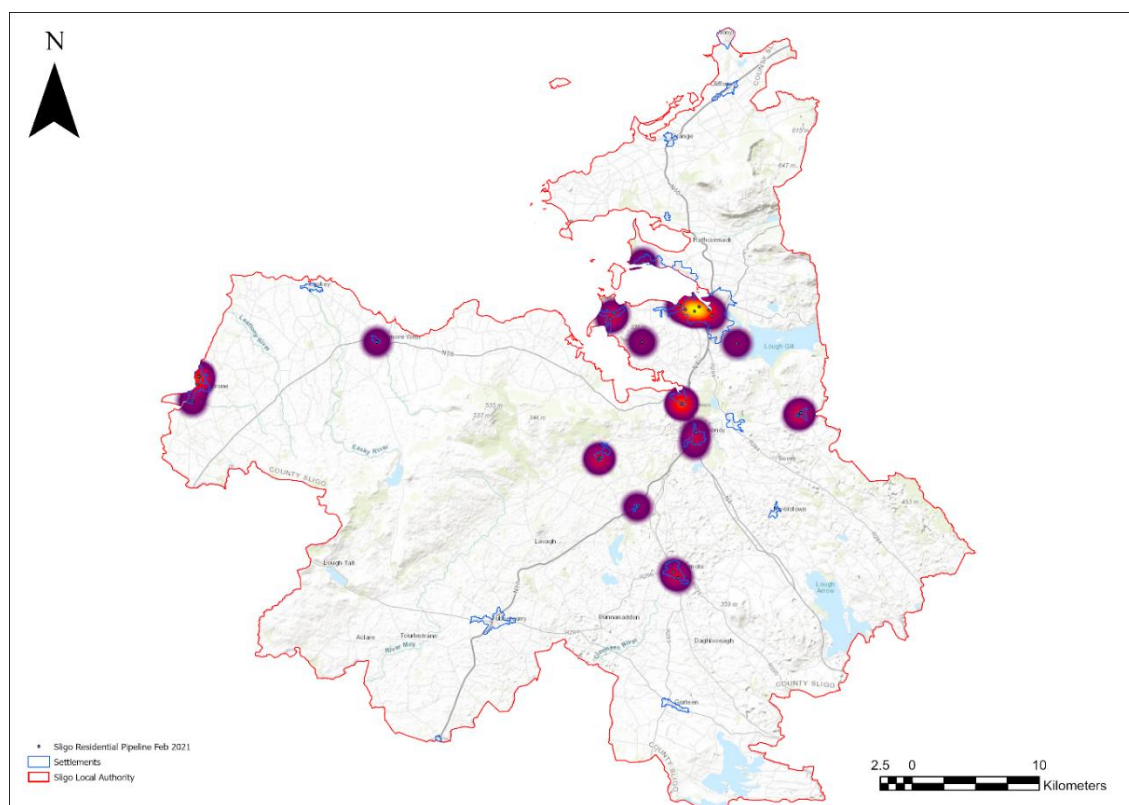
Figure 3-17: County Sligo Residential Planning Pipeline (Feb 2016 - Feb 2021)

A total of 766 units are offered by all 30 developments, with the largest volume being provided in Sligo Town with 426 units of which 302 units have commenced construction and 124 have a granted status. Inniscrone consists of 47 units which have been granted planning approval status but have yet to commence. Pipeline developments in Ballisodare consist of 39 units which have yet to be granted. The settlement of Coolaney offers a further 38 units which have yet to be approved.

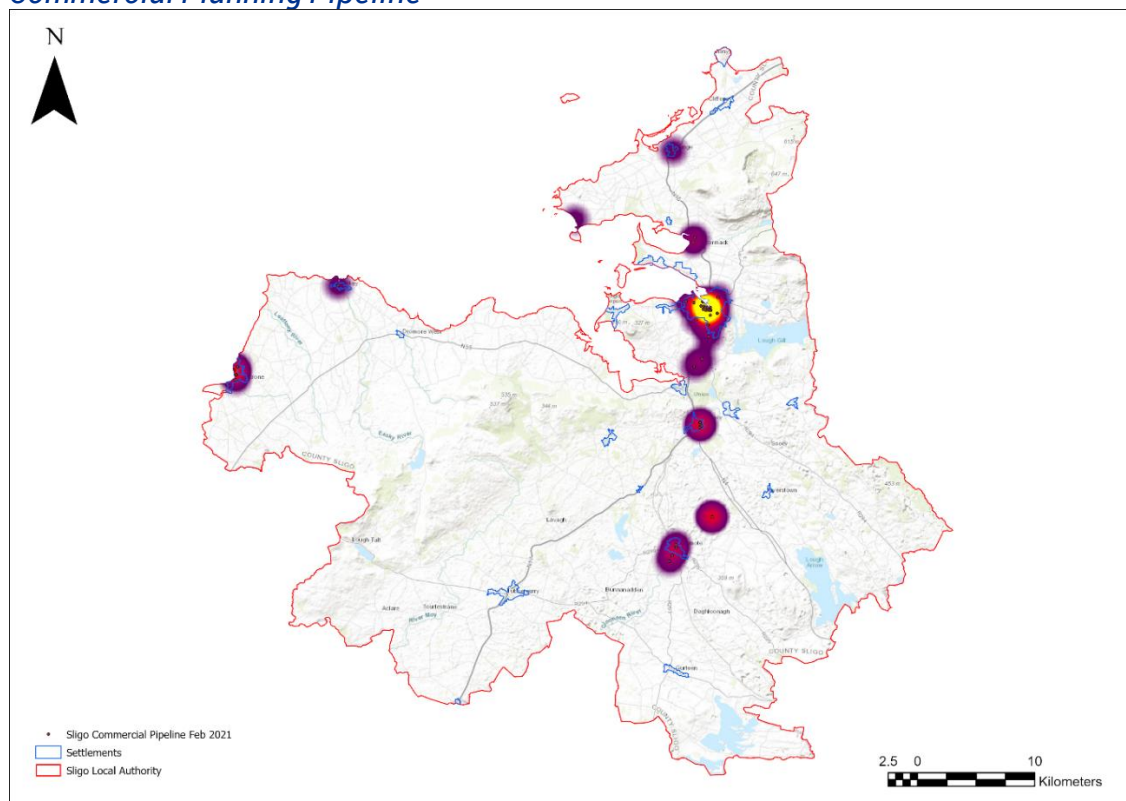*3.4.4.2   Commercial Planning Pipeline*

Figure 3-18: County Sligo Commercial Planning Pipeline (Feb 2016 - 2021)

A total of 51 commercial developments have been granted approval within Sligo County. 22 of these have been granted in Sligo Town with 4 developments scheduled for approval for Inniscrone and Collooney. 14 of the units provided in Sligo Town will offer commercial facilities while a further 8 developments will increase the Town's retail facilities. 12 of these developments have commenced construction with the remainder possessing a granted status.

Three developments in Collooney will offer commercial facilities while the remaining development is for retail facilities. Meanwhile, Inniscrone has three retail developments granted approval while the remainder will be related to commercial services. Ballymote will also offer more retail facilities with four retail outlets granted approval. Both Grange and Easky contain one proposed development with granted approval for commercial facilities.

3.4.5   Potential Growth Areas

The Sligo County Development Plan of 2017 highlighted that urban development in Sligo Town has grown unevenly compared to other county settlements and rural populations. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions the potential for rural community growth has increased. Towns such as Tubbercurry and Ballymote which originally served as support settlements for a growing population that was commuting into Sligo Town now have potential for sustainable growth. The CSO's *"Effect on Remote Working"*

[19] recorded that 30% of the Northern and Western Region's population commenced working from home during the pandemic and also noted an associated increase in longer working hours. However, the Region was also the highest in providing employment not suitable to remote working. Potential growth can therefore be provided through collaborative working hubs such as Strandhill and Tubbercurry, which have both commenced the provision of facilities for shared working spaces under the Connected Hubs Initiative. Furthermore, this initiative could be extended to settlements of similar size such as Ballymote and Collooney. With the improvement in digital infrastructure, opportunities can be further provided to local populations staying within local settlement catchment areas due to better working commitments and less commuting time. With the improvements in lifestyle balance, and healthy initiatives such as the Cycle Strategy and development of greenways, local workers may be inclined to consider working from home more and use more sustainable modes of transport when needed. To enrich the local business demography, Local Enterprise Centres should be supported in upskilling local SME organisations to avail of sustainable technology and meet the demand of an increased customer base which is choosing to work from home.

Table 3-18: Recorded Effects of Remote Working

Effect of Remote Working				
	Started remote working (%)	Increased number of hours remote working (%)	Unable to work Business was unable to offer the facility of remote working (%)	Work was not suitable for remote working (%)
State	**34**	**12**	**11**	**20**
Sex				
Male	31	12	13	21
Female	38	13	9	18
Age Group				
15-24	23	3	18	23
25-34	35	10	5	14
35-44	42	19	11	16
45-54	38	15	10	19
55-64	28	8	13	32
65+	18	6	16	25
Region (NUTS2)				
Northern and Western	30	8	11	23
Southern	29	9	11	21
Eastern and Midland	39	15	11	18

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[19] Employment and Life Effects of COVID-19

Source: CSO

[1] Figures in this table are calculated from the 47% of population whose employment was affected by COVID-19
[2] Results are based on a sample of persons aged 15 and over from weeks 1, 2 and 3 of the Q2 2020 Labour Force Survey
Note: The survey allowed for multiple responses to the question relating to life effects due to COVID19 for this reason percentages will not add to 100%.

3.5 Theme 4: Transport, Accessibility and Mobility

Transport information was used to assess the reliance of households on private and public modes of transport in the County. Data sourced from the 2011 and 2016 Census indicated a substantial decrease of 13% of households with 'no cars' at County level, while the Sligo Town figure declined by 10%. Generally, County level data indicates a higher overall dependency on cars, with 42% of households with access to at least one car, while the number in Sligo Town was recorded at 43%. The use of alternative transport (includes travelling by bicycle, by foot, bus, minibus, coach, or train) in the County was generally low (21%; 2016) and declining (23%; 2011), with a higher uptake in alternative transport in Sligo Town of 28% (2016). This number is however also lower than the corresponding 2011 figure of 30%.

Latest CSO data on the registration of private cars by the Sligo Licensing Authority identify the number of private vehicles licensed. Between January 2019 and May 2021, 22,506 vehicles were registered in Co. Sligo. The following graph provides an overview of the data.
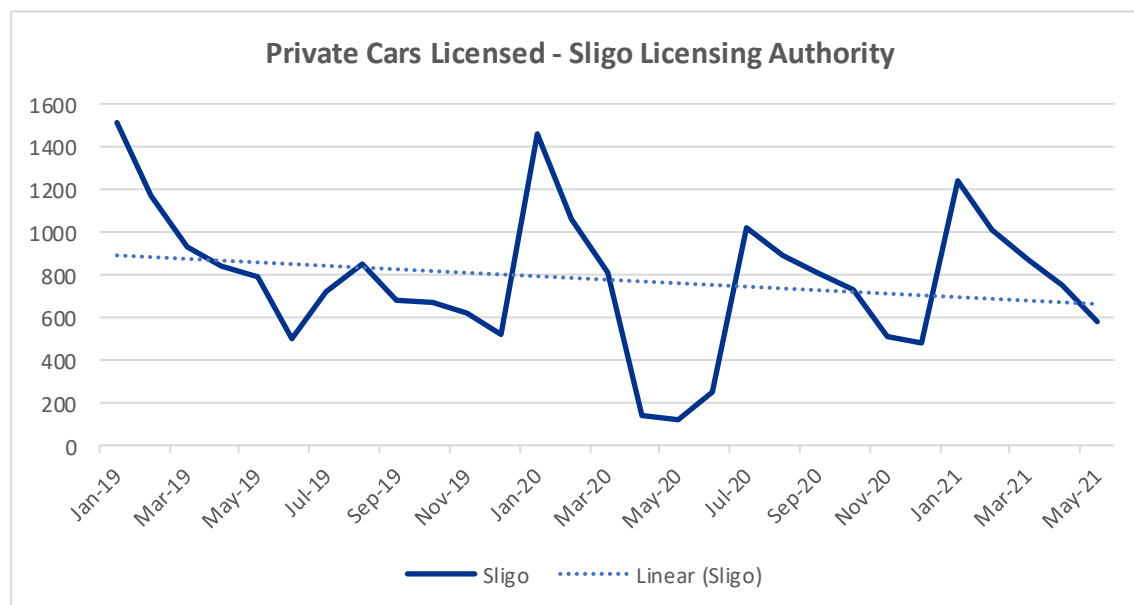

Figure 3-19: Private Cars Licensed (Jan 2019 – May 2021)

Despite the peaks in licensing seen for the months of January and July, the overall number of private car registrations has been on a slight downward trend. This trend might suggest that the reliance on private cars for travel is declining.

The following table provides an overview of the means of travel to a place of work or education for people in the County and the Town.

Table 3-19: Means of Travel (2016)

	Sligo County		Sligo Town	
	Work	Educ.	Work	Educ.
On foot	8%	19%	16%	31%
Bicycle	1%	1%	2%	2%
Bus minibus or coach	1%	18%	2%	8%
Train DART or LUAS	0%	0%	0%	1%
Motorcycle or scooter	0%	0%	0%	0%
Car driver	65%	6%	61%	6%
Car passenger	4%	52%	5%	48%
Van	8%	0%	5%	0%
Other (incl. lorry)	1%	0%	0%	0%
Work mainly at or from home	6%	0%	3%	0%
Not stated	5%	3%	5%	4%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

As seen in Table 3-19, 66% of commuters to work and 54% to school used a car in the Town, while County figures went up to 69% and 58% respectively in 2016. Travelling on foot in the Town was recorded as nearly double that of the County percentage, while respondents in the County made more use of bus or coach services for transport to a place of education than those in the Town. Despite the higher use of green transport in the Town, the average commute time increased slightly from 17 minutes to 18 minutes between 2011 and 2016, potentially reflecting higher volumes of traffic and traffic congestion. Later data (2019) shows the same trend in the use of different means of travel at Border Region level, with car travel and walking recorded as the most used modes of travel to places of work or school, as seen in Figure 3-20.
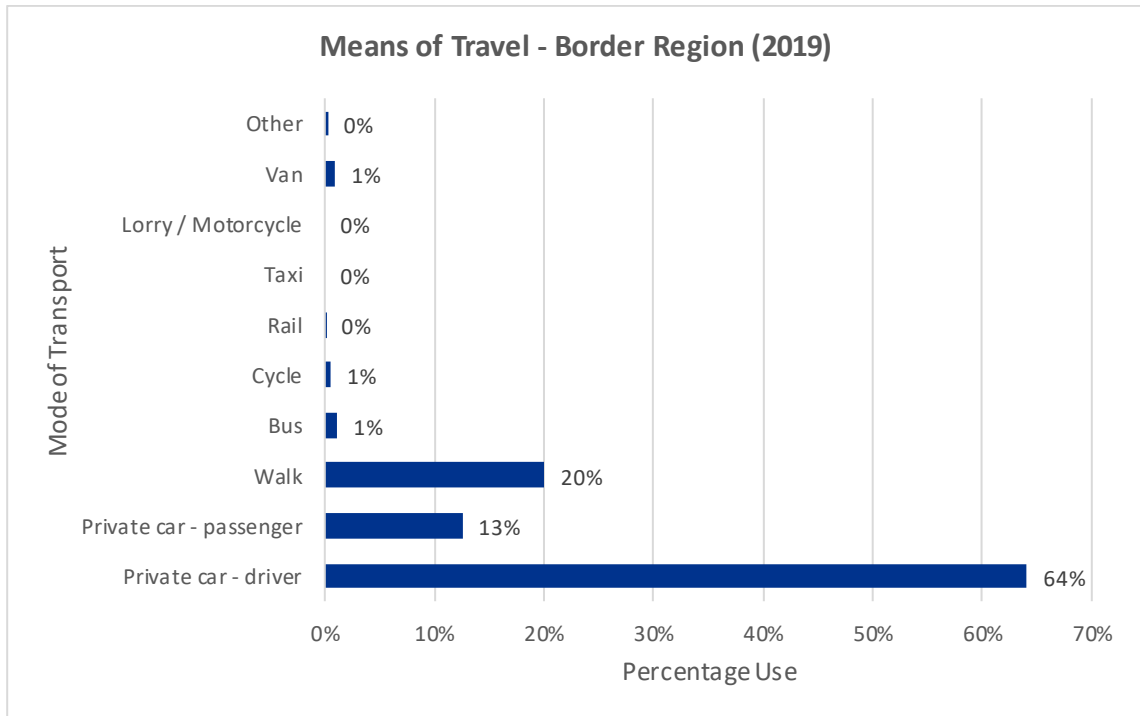
Figure 3-20: Means of Travel, Border Region (2019)

Overall, there are different modes of transport on offer at County level, as seen in the following figure.
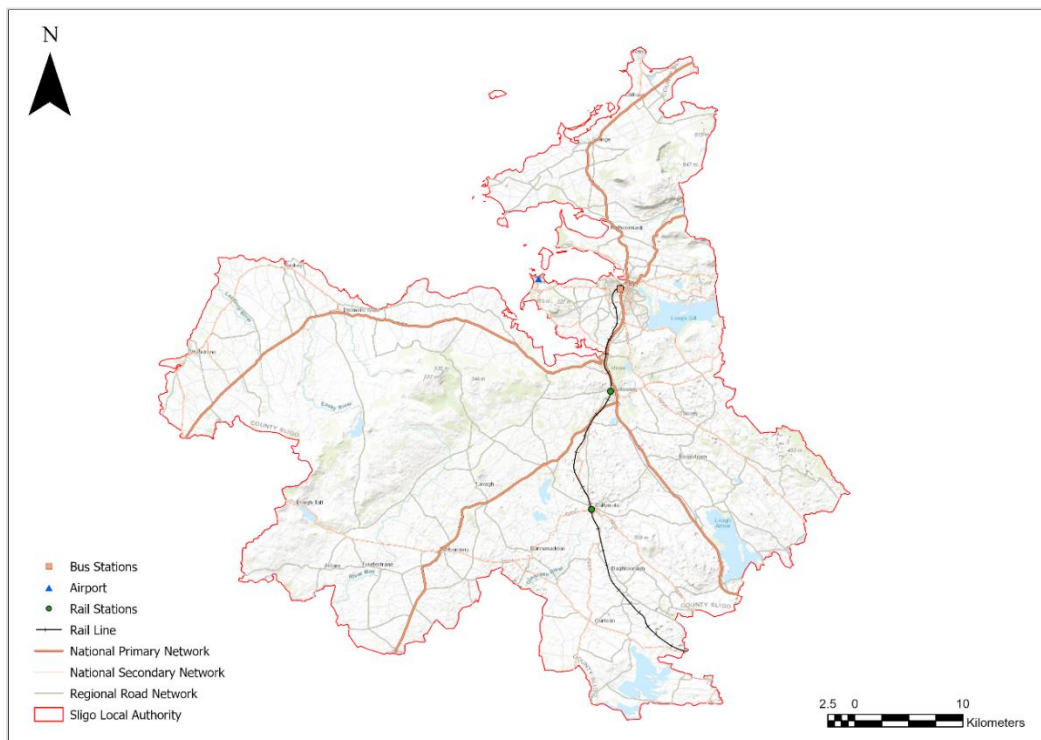

Figure 3-21: Main Transport Infrastructure

The national road network serves the north (toward Derry and Northern Ireland), south (toward Galway and Dublin (via Longford)), and west (toward Castlebar) of the County with primary roads, while regional and secondary road networks provide further connection and access throughout the County. The rail network in the County consists of three stops – Ballymote, Collooney, and Sligo Town, with services from Longford and Dublin. There is also a network of bus stops within Sligo (with stops, among others, at Sligo Station, Sligo Technological University, Sligo Hospital, Sligo Retail Park, Collooney, and Castlebaldwin) providing regional transport services to other main centres nationally, including Galway, Limerick, Dublin, Cork, Derry and Belfast.

Place of Work, School or College - Census of Anonymised Records (POWSCAR) data recorded during the last Census (2016) indicate the movement of people to and from County Sligo for the reasons of travelling to respective places of work or education. The following figure presents the number of people travelling *from other areas[20] to County Sligo* for the purpose of work or education.
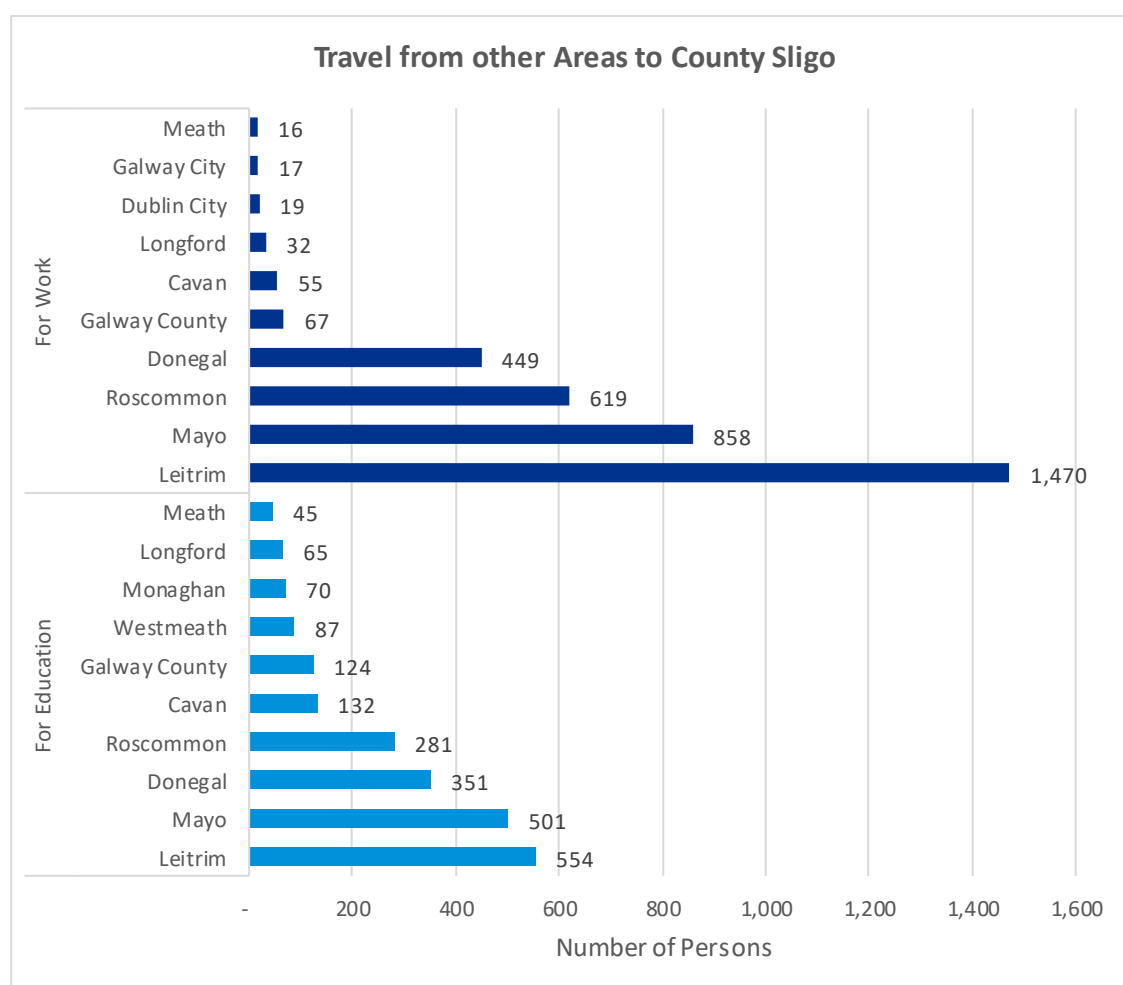

Figure 3-22: Travel from other Areas to County Sligo for Work or Education

[20] 2016 POWSCAR data provided a list of 30 areas (County and Town) from which inflow to Co. Sligo was recorded. Selection in this assessment is of the top ten highest inflow data per category and does not represent all inflow data from other Counties / cities.

As seen in Figure 3-22, most of the people travelling to County Sligo for work and education came from the Counties immediately surrounding County Sligo, including Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, and Donegal. Together, these surrounding counties contributed 67.7% of the approximate[21] 2,492 persons travelling for education and 91.3% of the approximate 3,721 persons travelling for work to County Sligo. When assessing travel patterns *from County Sligo to other areas,* it was highlighted that 48.5% of all persons leaving County Sligo for work went to the counties of Mayo, Leitrim, Roscommon, and Donegal. This corresponds with figures of persons travelling to County Sligo, indicating the interconnectedness of economic activity between County Sligo and its surrounding areas. The outflow of persons travelling from County Sligo for education were highest to Galway City, County Roscommon, and Dublin City. A summary[22] of this data is presented in Figure 3-23 below.
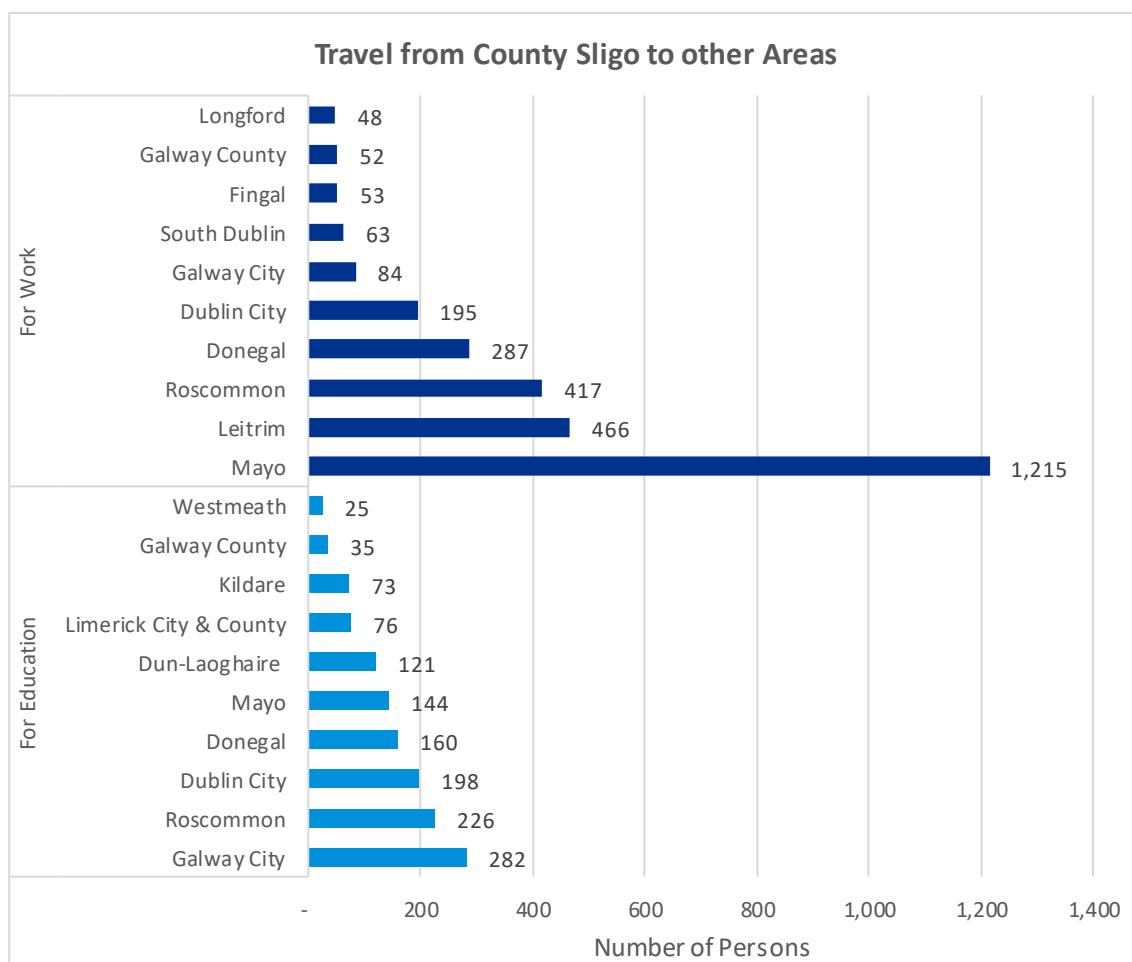

Figure 3-23: Travel from County Sligo to other Areas for Work or Education

Overall inflow and outflow figures recorded are presented in Table 3-20.

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[21] POWSCAR values calculated to a minimum value of six (6) per area assessed. For areas with counts lower than six (6), a representative value of 2.5 was attributed.

[22] Selection in this assessment is of the top ten highest outflow data per category and does not represent all inflow data from other Counties / cities.

Table 3-20: Summary of Inflow and Outflow of Persons to and from County Sligo for Work and Education (2016 POWSCAR)

	Inflow to Co. Sligo	Outflow from Co. Sligo	Net flow
For Work	3,721	3,202	519
For Education	2,492	1,413	1,080

Although a net outflow of 357 persons was recorded from County Sligo to County Mayo for work, there was an overall net inflow of 519 persons travelling to County Sligo for work. This figure, however, does not include the 1,717 persons stating that they work at or mainly from home in County Sligo. Altogether, 1,080 persons travel from other areas (mainly Counties Leitrim, Mayo, and Donegal) to County Sligo for their place of education, excluding the 46 persons recorded as doing home schooling/education. The strong inflows of persons to County Sligo for work and education highlights the strength and potential of the County as a location that provides high quality education facilities and a centre point for commercial activity within the region.

As of August 2021, the National Transport Agency (NTA) has proposed a number of projects which will impact the transport infrastructure in Sligo County. The largest being the Active Travel Investment Programme. This national initiative will allocate over €70 million in the first year of a five-year plan across 340 sustainable projects in 19 authorities. This initiative is the first of its kind to be launched by the government targeting active travel in rural Ireland. Funding will focus on the development of high-quality walking and cycling facilities which will encourage more people to switch to active travel. Another initiative which will impact the transport infrastructure of County Sligo is the proposed Walking/Cycling scheme from Sligo Technical University to Hyde Bridge.
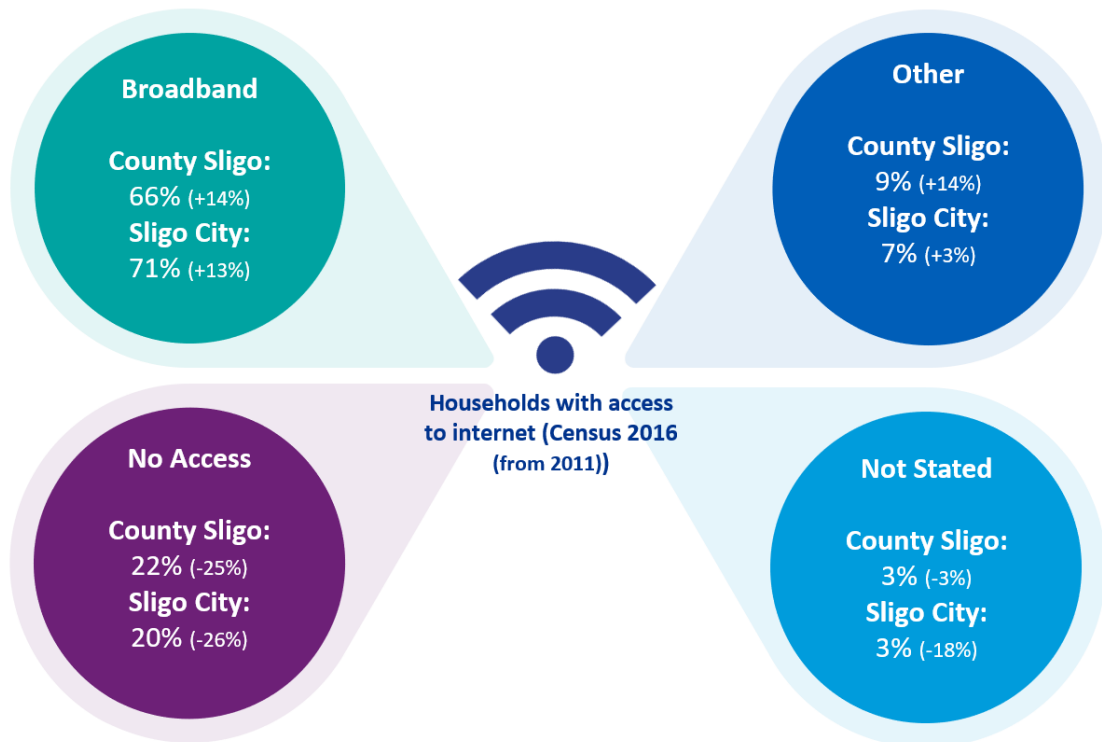
During 2021 the major infrastructure upgrade of the N4 Collooney to Castle Baldwin Road Project outlined in the previous Sligo LECP report and the County Development Plan has been completed. This 15km long dual Carriageway will enhance the Northwest Region, by further connecting Dublin with Sligo and the N17 Atlantic Corridor network.

3.6   Theme 5: Digital Transformation

Internet connectivity is an essential aspect that contributes to the digital transformation of the living and working environment. The CSO also notes a strong correlation between level of affluence (or deprivation) and level of connectivity and access. In general terms, a significant difference is noted in fixed broadband connections between deprivation quintiles. A fixed broadband connection is common for 95% of households in the *very affluent* deprivation quintile. Of households rated in the *very disadvantaged* deprivation quintile, 80% have a fixed broadband connection, while 75% of households rated in the *disadvantaged* deprivation quintile have a fixed broadband connection in their home. Households in the lower deprivation quintiles most commonly make use of mobile broadband internet connections, with internet access for *very disadvantaged* and *disadvantaged* households both at 56%. By

comparison, mobile broadband connection for households in the *very affluent* deprivation quintile is only 42%.

As seen in the figure below, household access to the internet (as recorded in the 2016 Census) has increased significantly at County and Town level, with 66% and 71% of households in the County and Town respectively recorded as having internet access at home. The increase in connectivity is also reflected in the large decreases of

Broadband

County Sligo:
66% (+14%)
Sligo City:
71% (+13%)

Other

County Sligo:
9% (+14%)
Sligo City:
7% (+3%)

Households with access to internet (Census 2016 (from 2011))

No Access

County Sligo:
22% (-25%)
Sligo City:
20% (-26%)

Not Stated

County Sligo:
3% (-3%)
Sligo City:
3% (-18%)

households with no access.

Figure 3-24: Households with access to internet

Mid-West Regional statistics released by the CSO states that 91% of recorded households in 2019 have an internet connection, which increased by 2% since 2018. Fixed broadband is the most common type of access with 84% compared with 47% using mobile broadband. The National Broadband Plan notes further development in the roll out of broadband for County Sligo. A 2020 report states that 14,803 premises have been recorded in the National Broadband Plan in Sligo. Of the 14,803 premises Broadband Connections Points (BCP) will be located at public areas such as Schools and Community Centres. As indicated in the following map, high speed broadband will be brought to intervention areas by utilising existing infrastructures, targeting a guaranteed minimum of 500mb download speed to its users. Amber marked areas on the map have been identified as areas where users will not have access to reliable speeds without a connection to the National Broadband Plan, with building in Sligo set to commence between Q1 and Q3 of 2021.
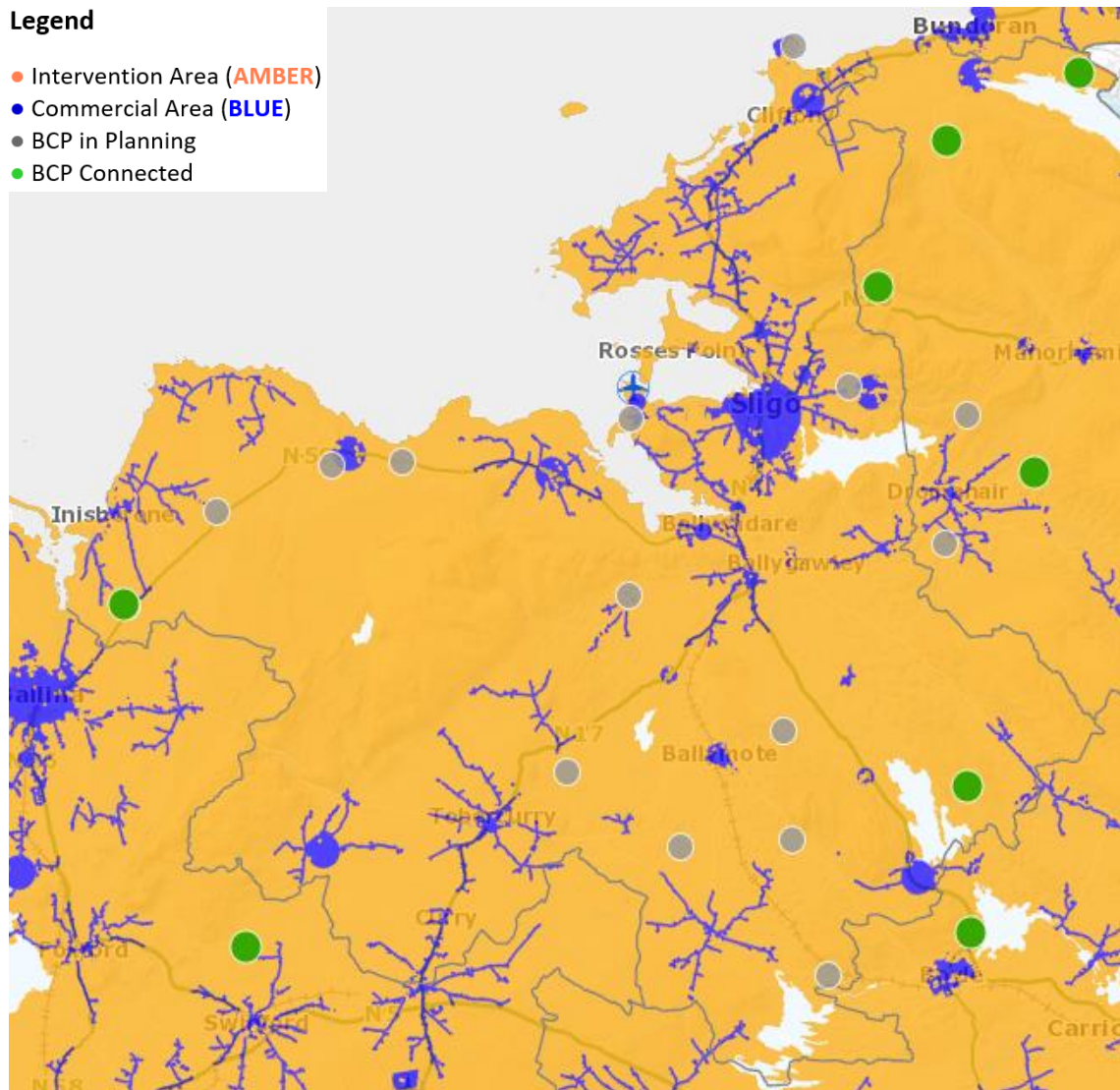
Figure 3-25: Roll-out of National Broadband Plan in Co. Sligo

3.6.1   Sligo Digital Strategy

The EU defines a Smart City as one where "traditional networks and services are made more efficient with the use of digital solutions for the benefit of its inhabitants and business."[23] To achieve this efficiency, these digital solutions need to go beyond the use of conventional application such as in relation to resource management or emission reduction. Instead, such solutions need to be used in enhancing the analysis of transport networks, upgrading of facilities, improving reporting, and streamlining of methods that provide services to residents within the local authority.

To help realise the EU's vision for smart cities, Sligo has adapted a Digital Strategy for 2020 – 2023[24] which provides a framework to enable the transition to a more digital

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[23] Smart Cities
[24] Sligo County Council Digital Strategy 2020 - 2030

community with related infrastructure. The strategy will target key elements such as digital upskilling of the labour force, upgrading of digital infrastructure throughout the Local Authority, enhancement of local economy through collaboration and shared facilities, and streamlining of Local Authority services. The main objective of the Digital Strategy is to put into effect the initial requirements which are needed to improve the Digital Infrastructure throughout Sligo and in doing so provide a foundation which future iterations can build upon.

This strategy provides an approach which will have capacity to adapt to future green and smart technology which Sligo County Council will have to implement to ensure alignment with the EU's smart city objectives. To initiate the progression to a more digital focused environment, Sligo's Technological University (TU) leadership will implement the EU's Open Innovation 2.0 approach. This innovative approach aims to increase collaboration between stakeholders from government, industry, academia, and the public to increase Open Innovation through networking, collaboration, and research from all sides of the community.

This strategy will provide a framework for digital innovation between 2020 and 2023 which will assist in enhancing regional development as outlined in this report.

3.6.1.1 *Digital Labour Force*
To increase participation and collaboration by stakeholders' access to learning facilities must be provided. Collaboration and participation can be enhanced in Sligo through the development of a highly skilled, digitally knowledgeable workforce. For instance, through initiatives available via the Local Enterprise Office and the North West Regional Skills Forum, local SMEs and entrepreneurs can upskill in IT and media courses. Furthermore, with Sligo's growing education campus, a wide range of certified digital and analytical programmes are available to provide a local workforce with highly developed IT skills. This includes the ability to provide a wide range of digital skills and courses to entry level graduates, with Sligo Technological University (TU) offering over 20 courses in digital education and IT.
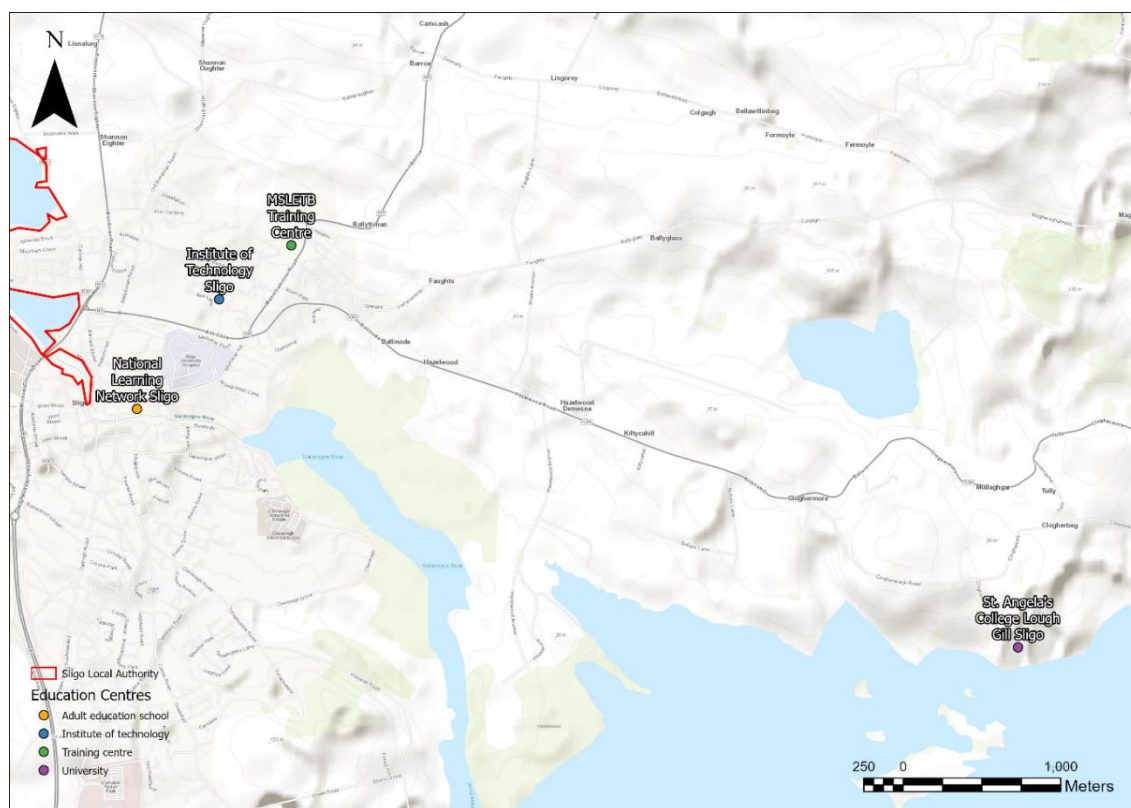
Figure 3-26: Education Centres in County Sligo

Collaboration between stakeholders can also be enhanced through the Working Hub initiatives.[25] With the launch of the connected hubs initiative by The National Hub Network designated spaces for co-working and remote working offer benefits to employers, local communities, and the local economy. Currently there are six registered connected hubs located throughout Sligo County. Two are situated within Sligo Town, with Sligo Airport in Strandhill offering a third. Collooney Retail Park offers a hub in the middle of the County with Tubbercurry offering a further two facilities. However, to the West and the North of the County there have not yet been any registered hubs. Under the Digital Strategy put forward by Sligo, a collaborative working environment must be provided for all settlements to create a fully connected and digitally sustainable environment.

3.6.1.2   ICT infrastructure

The second key element of the Digital Strategy is to improve the digital infrastructure within Sligo County in order to enhance connectivity and allow new information to be collected. One of the key components in implementing this aspect is the upgrading of public buildings to allow for new digital resources. An example of this is the Tubbercurry Community Library, which is implementing a number of improvements to its IT infrastructure, so that the building can be used as a digital resource and service centre. The EU smart city initiative also encourages local authorities to explore new

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[25] The National Hubs Network

innovative features to record and collect information to improve the sustainability of the environment which they serve. An initiative which Sligo is implementing is the trialling of photocells on urban streetlights. This leading digital initiative using Wi-Fi and Bluetooth within existing infrastructure such as streetlights and electricity poles, aims to collect live data and perform analytics on the usage of urban spaces. As such, these cells can collect data which can aid in decision-making and can be used to understand the impact of various initiatives or policy decisions.

The Digital Strategy also endorses the future proofing of new infrastructural projects such as the upgrading of the county road network which has been set out in the RSES Regional Plan. A suggestion for collaboration is the sharing of fibreoptic ducting between businesses while road networks are being upgraded. This collaboration would mean easier installation of digital infrastructure without any further construction and allow better connectivity for rural settlements throughout the county.

Another EU description of smart cities includes relaying data in live time, with an example of this technology being the use of traffic signal and fibre-optic communication technology along the N4/N15 roads. This technology collects real-time data optimising traffic signal settings to road network conditions, leading to reduced travel times and congestion which improves fuel consumption and reduces pollution. It also improves road safety by providing faster updates in relation to changing conditions for road users.

There is also a significant increase in connectivity planned across the region, predominantly in the more rural under-served areas, through further rollout of Broadband Connection Points (BCP's) as envisaged under the National Broadband Plan. This should be to the benefit of remote schools and community centres, amongst others, who will benefit from enhanced digital access through the plan.

3.6.1.3   *Digital Innovation and Economic Development*
To aid in the innovation of the local economy, several initiatives have been launched such as an updated brand 'Sligo.(dot)' and the provision of co-working spaces and access to training through the Local Enterprise Office. The largest of these initiatives is the planned Digital Futures Manufacturing Centre (DFMC) which will be based in Sligo Town. The Centre will serve the North West and Border regions in supporting industry to develop capability in relation to the automation of manufacturing supply chains. The Centre will align with the implementation of the Ireland Industry 4.0 Strategy[26] and the project has been developed to support the digital transformation of the manufacturing sector. The strategy aims to stimulate firms to build capability in Industry 4.0 technologies that in turn can offer new business opportunities. The strategy will also provide current and future workforces with the correct skills needed to deliver industry 4.0 technology. This will include establishing a world-renowned business ecosystem with high standardisation and the appropriate regulatory environment.

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[26] Ireland Industry 4.0 Strategy

There are also a number of smart sustainable initiatives by the County Council allowing for the use of new digital services for the benefit of residents in settlements throughout the Local Authority. These smart sustainable initiatives include using energy saving street lighting and live bin sensors which relay capacity information to streamline bin collection times and reduce litter. The Council also allow businesses and customers to pay for services in towns using online payments. Further planned smart initiatives will see live data relayed regarding the water quality of blue flag beaches and the collecting of data for transport, parking and telecommunications. To maximise collaboration with stakeholders the County Council will enable this data to be freely and securely available for analysis and to drive research in the area of smart technology.

Other national agencies have been carrying out similar initiatives in Sligo with an example being the HSE's Digital Health Living Lab. Working in cooperation with Amazon, this development could potentially create a Digital Health Management Centre of Excellence. Other projects include the Global Telecom Infra Project consisting of hundreds of companies across the Telecoms industry working to drive and advance global connectivity.

3.6.1.4   *A Strategic Action Plan*

With the Digital Strategy now in place, Sligo's digital infrastructure will be further enhanced by providing increased home connections to online services through the National Broadband Plan. With more fibreoptic ducting networks in place, broadband connections in settlements will be increased, allowing for new technological initiatives to be rolled out faster. This will be further enhanced through increased free urban Wi-Fi in public areas allowing for constant internet access for the public. For rural communities, access to the internet will be enhanced through the increase in 4G and soon 5G mobile phone coverage.

To guarantee the correct implementation and monitoring of the Digital Strategy, Sligo County Council will develop a model which follows best practices in combining both technical and governance excellence. Part of this governance model will see the development of a digital reference framework extending across infrastructure, communication, sensors, platforms, applications, and security layers. Sligo County Council will hold the main responsibility in accounting for, storing, and governing digital infrastructure and its services, such as roads, water networks and ducting. Furthermore, to oversee the digital development aspects of the Strategy the Council will create a new Digital Development position.

3.7   Theme 6: Community Wellbeing

As stated in 6.1 of the Ireland 2040 Plan[27], quality of life is measured by a range of elements such as access to health and education services as well as overall life

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[27] Ireland 2040 Plan available at: https://npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/0540-Sligo-Economic-Forum.compressed.pdf

satisfaction. The following section provides an overview of social and community indicators that assess the level of peoples' wellbeing. Specific reference is made to CSO data, the Pobal HP Deprivation Index and the County Sligo Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022. For information on community amenities and facilities please see section 3.4.3 Spatial Community Development and for a sample list of community and volunteer groups in Sligo please see Table 6-2: Community and Volunteer Groups By PPN Pillar.

The wellbeing of people is considered by looking at different indicators of a healthy social and community environment. The Sligo SICAP, which is managed by the Sligo LCDC and implemented by the County Sligo LEADER Partnership CLG from January 2018, aims to address long-term high levels of deprivation, unemployment, and social challenges faced by those in disadvantaged groups. The SICAP sets out to achieve two main goals through targeted community intervention programmes. The two main goals are:

1   Supporting Communities
   — To support communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues, developing the capacity of Local Community Groups, and creating more sustainable communities.
2   Supporting Individuals
   — To support disadvantaged individuals and improve the quality of their lives through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market supports.

3.7.1   Pobal HP Deprivation Index

For an overview of the relative deprivation rating and profile of an area, the Pobal HP Deprivation Index[28] has been examined. Pobal maps are used to provide area deprivation profiling. The use of the relative index shows how performance in an area relates to all other areas at that point in time, by using the latest census data. The colour shading of the map is based on the level of deprivation, which ranges from Extremely Affluent to Extremely Disadvantaged according to the Pobal HP Deprivation Score of each Small Area (SA) (but is displayed at Electoral Division level). The Relative HP Deprivation Score shows the position of any given SA relative to all other SAs and is based on the latest available data from Census 2016. The use of the relative index shows how the performance of an area relates to all other areas at that point in time.
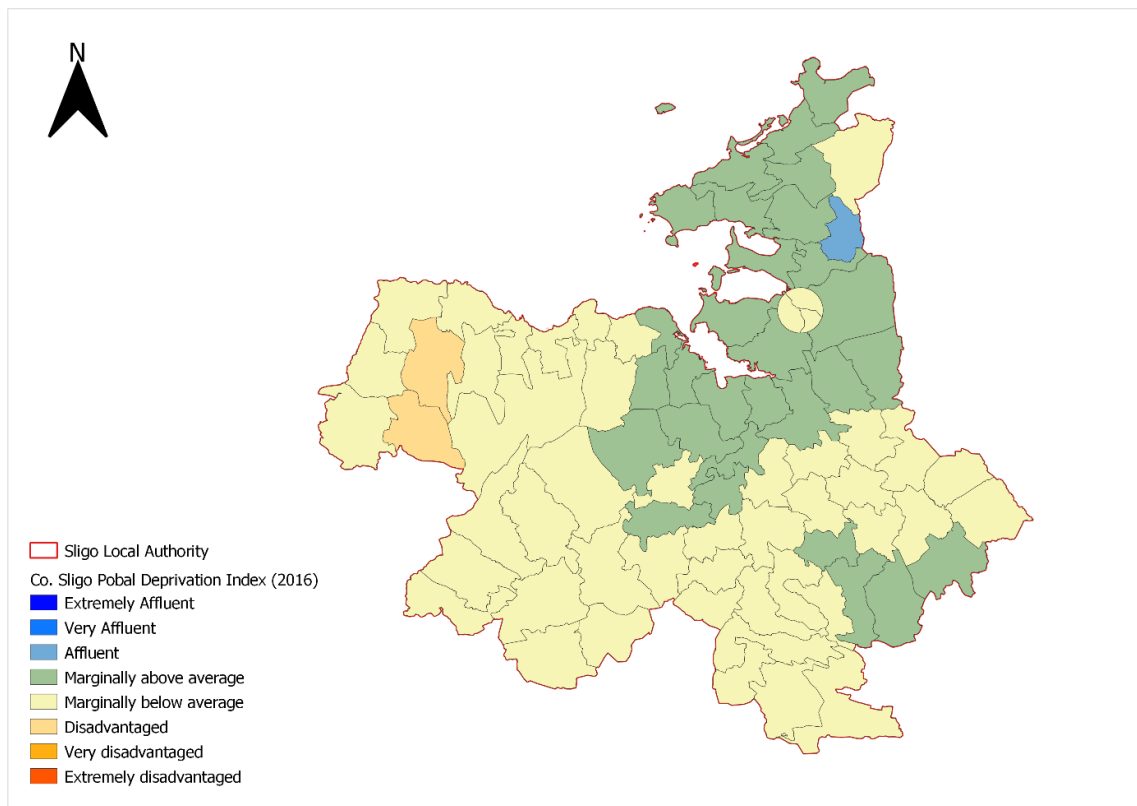
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[28] See: https://www.pobal.ie

Figure 3-27: County Sligo Pobal HP Deprivation Index (2016)

The following table presents the Pobal HP index scores and ratings as measured for County Sligo.

Table 3-21: County Sligo Pobal HP Deprivation Index Scores

	Relative Pobal HP Deprivation Index Scores					
	2006	**Index Rating**	**2011**	**Index Rating**	**2016**	**Index Rating**
County Sligo	-0.58	Marginally below average	-0.17	Marginally below average	-1.57	Marginally below average

Overall, County Sligo has been classified as marginally below average from 2006 to 2016, with an improvement in the ratings from 2006 to 2011, followed by a large deterioration in score to 2016. Relative affluence is distributed toward the northern and north eastern parts of the County, with pockets of disadvantaged areas further to the west, and areas below average to the south of the County. Wealth mainly centres in and around Sligo Town, and towards Grange and Cliffony.

3.7.2   Unemployment

As seen in Section 3.3, unemployment in County Sligo and Sligo Town decreased from 2011 to 2016 by 26.6% and 21.4% respectively. Looking at the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) data recorded by the CSO, unemployment in the Border Region overall also decreased.

Table 3-22: Quarterly Regional and National Employment Statistics (CSO)

Region		Q4 2017	Q4 2018	Q4 2019	Q4 2020	% Change
Border Region	In employment ('000)	180.1	177.7	183.9	178.9	-1%
	Unemployed ('000)	9	6.9	7.3	7.9	-12%
	In labour force ('000)	189.1	184.6	191.2	186.8	-1%
	Unemployment rate (%) (Persons aged 15-74)	4.8%	3.8%	3.9%	4.2%	-0.6%
	Participation rate (%)	60.3%	58.1%	59.3%	57.4%	-2.9%
State	Unemployment rate (%) (Persons aged 15-74)	6.1%	5.4%	4.5%	5.7%	-0.4%
	Participation rate (%)	62.2%	62.2%	62.7%	61.3%	-0.9%

As presented in Table 3-22, the unemployment figures at regional level dropped between 2017 and 2020, with unemployment rates dropping 0.6% over the period, and a similar drop in unemployment rates recorded nationally. Although there was an overall decrease, the impact of COVID-19 on employment is seen in the increase in unemployment and decrease in labour force participation from Q4 2019 to Q4 2020. It is noted that the labour force participation rate of the Border Region and the State also decreased from 2017 - 2020, indicating that less people in the region are currently employed or actively looking for employment. The decrease in the participation rate can be attributed to many factors, like a change in the type of industries providing employment, the demand for labour, the use of technology for automation, and a gap in required skill levels in the labour force. To increase labour force participation, employers and employees can consider reskilling or upskilling and providing more flexible working conditions.

The Live Register[29] (CSO) also recorded a decrease of 24% in the number of registered people in the Border Region (compared to a 19% decrease at State level). At County level, the Sligo SICAP Social Inclusion and Analysis Report 2020 indicated that unemployment in the County increased by 14% from February 2020 to August 2020, with 591 people being assisted through the SICAP.

3.7.3   Housing and Homelessness

2016 regional figures indicated that the Border Region had 193 homeless people, of which 131 were males and 62 were females. As stated in Section 3.2.2, there was an increase of 300% from 2016 – 2019 in the number of households receiving HAP from the Local Authority, with a large disparity in the number of households entering and leaving the HAP scheme. Furthermore, December 2019[30] data indicated that County Sligo had 501 additional households (approx. 1,282 people at 2016 average household

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[29] Provides a monthly series of the numbers of people (with some exceptions) registering for Jobseekers Benefit (JB) or Jobseekers Allowance (JA) or for various other statutory entitlements at local offices of the Department of Social Protection. It includes part-time workers (those who work up to three days per week), seasonal and casual workers entitled to JB and JA.

[30] As reported in Sligo SICAP Social Inclusion and Analysis Report 2020, data is sourced from the Housing Agency, December 2019. The data reflects the total number of households eligible for, and in need of, housing supports, and whose social housing need was not being met as at June 2019.

size) eligible, but not in receipt of housing supports. By June 2020, 30 people who were homeless or affected by housing exclusion were enlisted for the Sligo SICAP.

3.7.4 Lone Parent Households

As stated in Section 3.2.2, approximately 12% of households at Sligo County and Town levels (respectively) in 2016 were made up of one parent supporting a child or multiple children. Both male and female-headed single parent households increased from 2011 to 2016, with female-headed households with children or dependents increasing between 6% and 8% at Town and County levels.

CSO statistics recorded in 2016 indicated that 295 households with children in County Sligo were in need of social housing assistance, of which 65% (295) were single parent households. These figures decreased in 2017, with 182 households requiring housing assistance, of which 68% (124) were single parent households. A regional overview is presented in Table 3-23.

Table 3-23: Households with Children in Need of Housing Support

		Sligo	Cavan	Donegal	Leitrim	Monaghan	Border Region
2016	**All households with children**	295	431	862	106	316	2,010
	Single parent with child/children	192	159	563	50	168	1,132
		65%	37%	65%	47%	53%	56%
2017	**All households with children**	182	359	370	124	204	1,239
	Single parent with child/children	124	177	246	57	133	737
		68%	49%	66%	46%	65%	59%

Although it does not have the highest number of households in need of housing support in the Region, County Sligo does have the highest percentage of single parent households who need this support.

3.7.5 People with Disabilities

In a disability profile[31] of County Sligo issued in 2018, the Disability Federation of Ireland stated that approximately 15% (9,577 people) of the population in County Sligo have at least one disability, of which 66% are between 45 years and older.

The most common disabilities recorded were people having difficulty with pain, breathing, or any other chronic illness or condition and people with difficulty performing basic physical activities (both accounting for 26% of all disabled people). A third of disabled people in Sligo were reported to not have progressed beyond primary education, while only 19% of disabled people have completed higher education compared to 34% of the general County population.

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[31] Source: https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/disability-profile-sligo/ , All statistics based on Census 2016 data sourced through the CSO.

Compared to the 50% of the general population at work in Sligo, only 19% of disabled people were employed, while 16% of disabled people were recorded as living in social housing and 25% reliant on public or shared transport due to not having access to a suitable car or van for personal transport.

3.7.6 Minority Groups

As recorded by the Department of Justice and Equality[32] in August 2020, approximately 2.5% (179) of asylum seekers and 3.1% (94) of refugees in Ireland are resident in County Sligo. By June 2020, a total of 74 asylum seekers and refugees had registered for SICAP assistance in County Sligo. 23% of the registered persons participated in the assistance program, of which five persons progressed into employment, and one into self-employment.

Of the 384 Traveller population in County Sligo[33], 22 were registered for SICAP assistance by June 2020, of which 12 participated in an assistance course.

3.7.7 Community Health

The Census records the self-evaluated general health status of respondents (as opposed to the health status confirmed by medical practitioners). In terms of general health and wellbeing, disparate changes were recorded throughout the spectrum as seen in Table 3-24.

Table 3-24: Sligo County Population General Health Self-Assessment (CSO)

General Health	Male			Female			Total			
	2011	2016	% Change	2011	2016	% Change	2011	2016	% Change	2016%
Very good	18,605	18,632	0%	18,995	19,183	1%	37,600	37,815	1%	57.7%
Good	9,491	9,314	-2%	9,450	9,336	-1%	18,941	18,650	-2%	28.5%
Fair	2,983	2,912	-2%	3,132	3,109	-1%	6,115	6,021	-2%	9.2%
Bad	463	486	5%	456	482	6%	919	968	5%	1.5%
Very bad	81	76	-6%	87	94	8%	168	170	1%	0.3%
Not stated	812	945	16%	838	966	15%	1,650	1,911	16%	2.9%
Total	32,435	32,365	0%	32,958	33,170	1%	65,393	65,535	0%	

From the table it is noted that varied percentage changes in health status were recorded throughout Sligo County. Notable changes included a 6% and 8% increase in females with bad and very bad health, respectively, compared to a 6% decrease in males with very bad health. Despite the 57.7% of the County population being in very good health, a general decline in health is noted as the number of people in good and fair health declined in the intercensal period.

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[32] As referenced in Sligo SICAP Social Inclusion and Analysis Report 2020
[33] CSO Census 2016
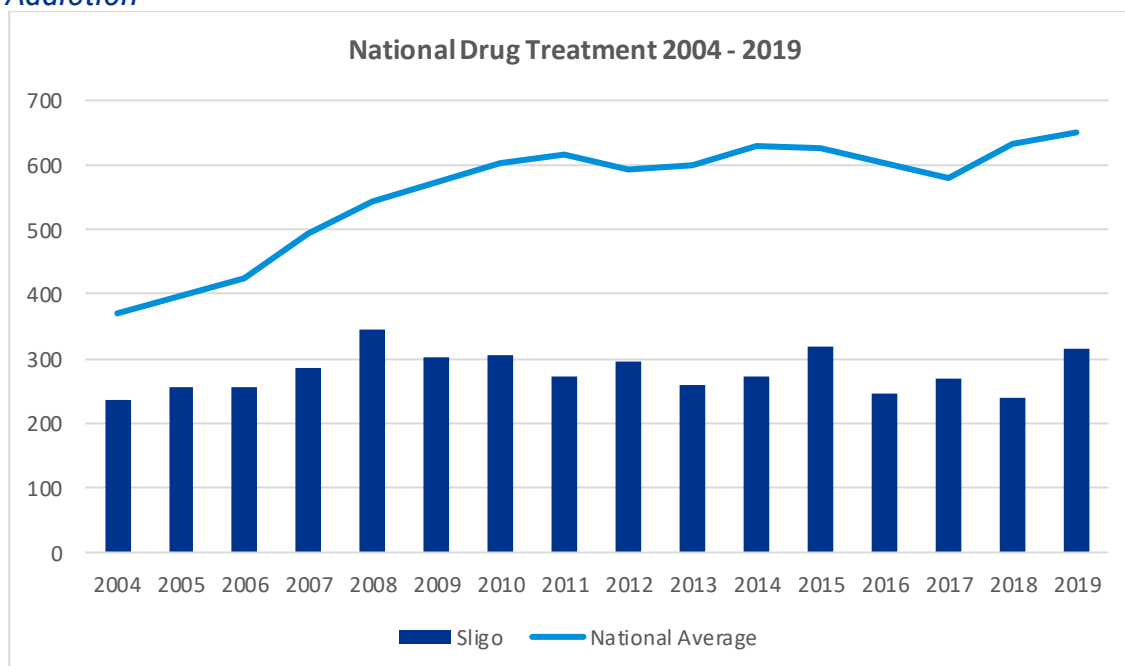
3.7.7.1   Addiction

Figure 3-28: Sligo Drug Treatment Figures Alongside National Average

Using data collected by the Health Research Board (HRB) [34] anonymous data regarding Drug and Alcohol treatment in Ireland is tracked through its national Drug Treatment Reporting System. This data gathers information on all types of drugs, including alcohol which calculates information on cases that started treatment in those years. The dataset includes cases treated through all types of services including outpatient and GPs.

From the above figure it can be seen that from 2004 addiction treatment in Sligo has seen a number of fluctuating cycles. The first of these was in 2008 with 345 registered cases. This subsequently steadily decreased to 260 in 2013. However, this figure increased to 320 in 2015, which then followed another decreasing trend until 2018, when 240 cases were recorded. In 2019 however, the 3rd highest figure was recorded at 314 registered cases. However, National average figures have experienced an increasing trend with the average increasing from 370 in 2004 to 650 in 2019.

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[34] HRB National Drugs Library (2020) National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS) online interactive tables. Available at: www.drugsandalcohol.ie/tables

3.7.7.2   Suicide

Deaths by Suicide
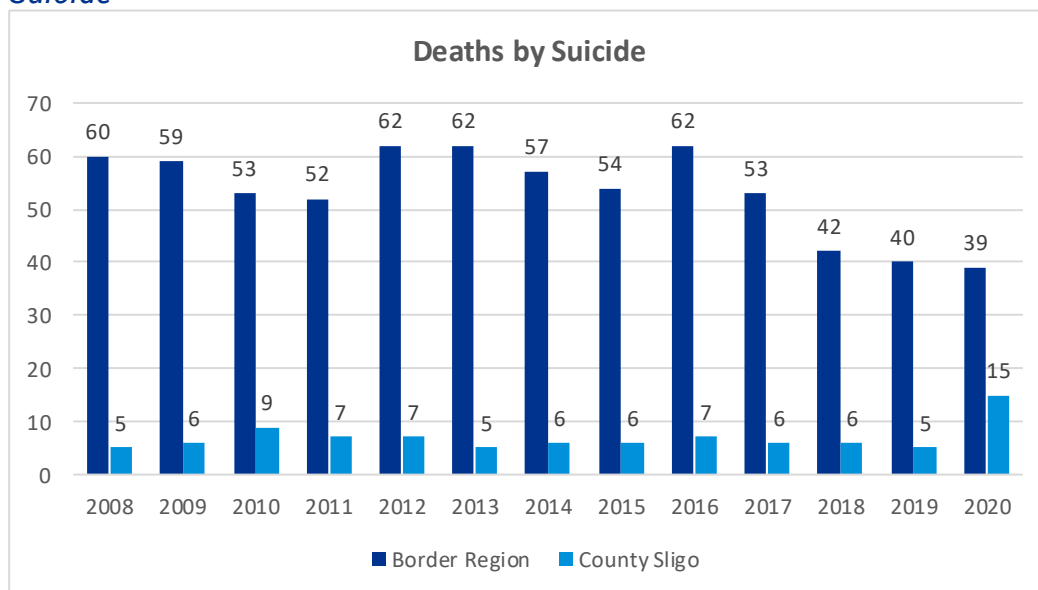
Figure 3-29: Registered Deaths Through Suicide in Sligo County and Border Region (CSO)

Using the CSO's Vital Statistics dataset all births, deaths and marriages are recorded on a quarterly basis. Within the registration of citizens who have died the cause of death is recorded. This allows for the aggregating of causes of death to calculate annual trends.

Sligo County recorded an average of 6 suicides a year from 2008, with the latest figure for 2020 recording 15 deaths. On a regional scale however, this figure has been decreasing from 2008 with 60 deaths being recorded in the Border Region in 2008 while only 39 were recorded in 2020.

3.7.7.3   Standard Mortality Rates

The Standardised Mortality Rates[35] (SMR) for County Sligo indicate a variety of illnesses that affect people in the County. Although the overall SMR for County Sligo was relatively in line with national SMR[36], as seen in Table 3-25, higher SMRs were recorded for a number of illnesses in the County. Deaths caused by diabetes mellitus, malignant neoplasms, diseases of the circulatory system, diseases of the kidney and ureter, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthrosis, and endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases were particularly higher than the national SMR over the five-year period. A 2015 health profile[37] of the County also recorded Sligo having the highest incidence nationally of female malignant melanoma and male prostate cancer, but average or below average for most other cancers.

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[35] The ratio of the number of deaths in the population (per 100,000 of population) of a geographic area to the expected number of deaths in that area based on age-specific mortality rates. IAHPC Pallipedia. https://pallipedia.org/standardized-mortality-ratio-rate/.

[36] Department of Health statistics hosted by the CSO.

[37] Health Profile 2015 Sligo. Health Service Executive (HSE) Public Health Profile Working Group. http://hdl.handle.net/10147/584058

Table 3-25: County Sligo and National Standardised Mortality Rate for Causes of Deaths

Cause of Death	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
	All*	Sligo	All*	Sligo	All*	Sligo	All*	Sligo	All*	Sligo
All causes of death	1,500	1,416	1,500	1,489	1,500	1,474	1,500	1,566	1,500	1,473
Cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung	1,500	1,272	1,500	1,790	1,500	1,441	1,500	797	1,500	1,613
Diabetes mellitus	1,500	2,377	1,500	2,795	1,500	2,462	1,500	1,792	1,500	2,327
Malignant neoplasms	1,500	1,311	1,500	1,669	1,500	1,433	1,500	1,507	1,500	1,536
Diseases of the circulatory system	1,500	1,467	1,500	1,515	1,500	1,713	1,500	1,608	1,500	1,393
Diseases of the digestive system	1,500	836	1,500	1,067	1,500	1,273	1,500	918	1,500	1,423
Diseases of the kidney and ureter	1,500	2,714	1,500	1,104	1,500	636	1,500	2,629	1,500	1,060
Diseases of the nervous system and the sense organs	1,500	1,436	1,500	1,307	1,500	1,708	1,500	1,510	1,500	2,317
Rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthrosis	1,500	1,707	1,500	5,357	1,400	1,770	1,200	2,920	1,500	657
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	1,500	2,674	1,500	2,258	1,500	2,606	1,500	2,052	1,500	1,892

*All Counties and Regions

SMR data regarding other psychological and consumption related deaths indicate that smoking related deaths in County Sligo are relatively in line with national figures, while alcohol related deaths were below national figures in the five years from 2014 to 2018. In turn, the number of deaths associated with mental and behavioural disorders increased dramatically from 2015 to 2017, far higher than the national SMR. Suicidal and intentional self-harm deaths fluctuated, although the County SMR for these deaths were considerably lower than the national SMR in 2018.
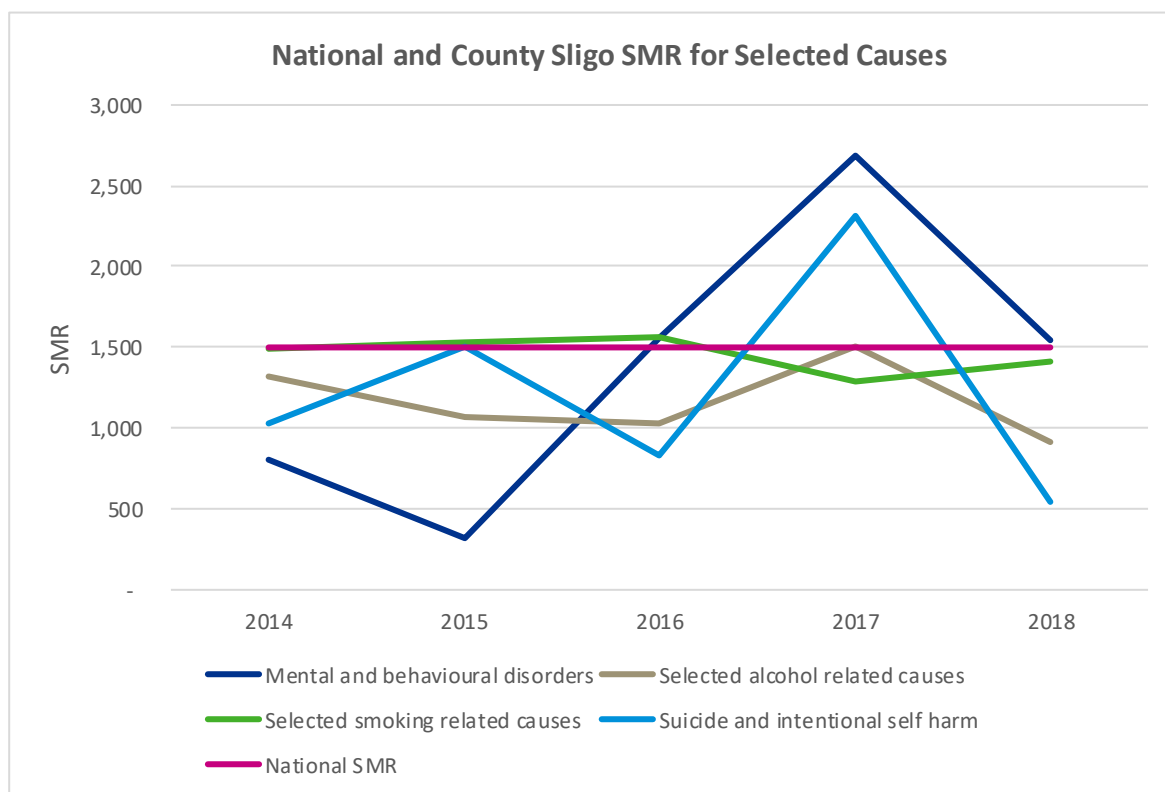
Figure 3-30: National and County Sligo SMR for Selected Causes

3.7.7.4 *Radon Gas*

Another prevalent health factor in County Sligo and the larger Border Region, is Radon gas. Radon gas is a radioactive gas that is formed underground by the natural decay of uranium present in different rocks and soil types. The decay of the uranium releases a clear, tasteless, smell-less gas that attributes 56% of the total radiation exposure of people in Ireland, and annually causes approximately 300 cases of lung cancer[38]. The following map provides a spatial representation of high-risk radon emission areas in the Border Region.

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[38] Environmental Protection Agency. https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/radon/
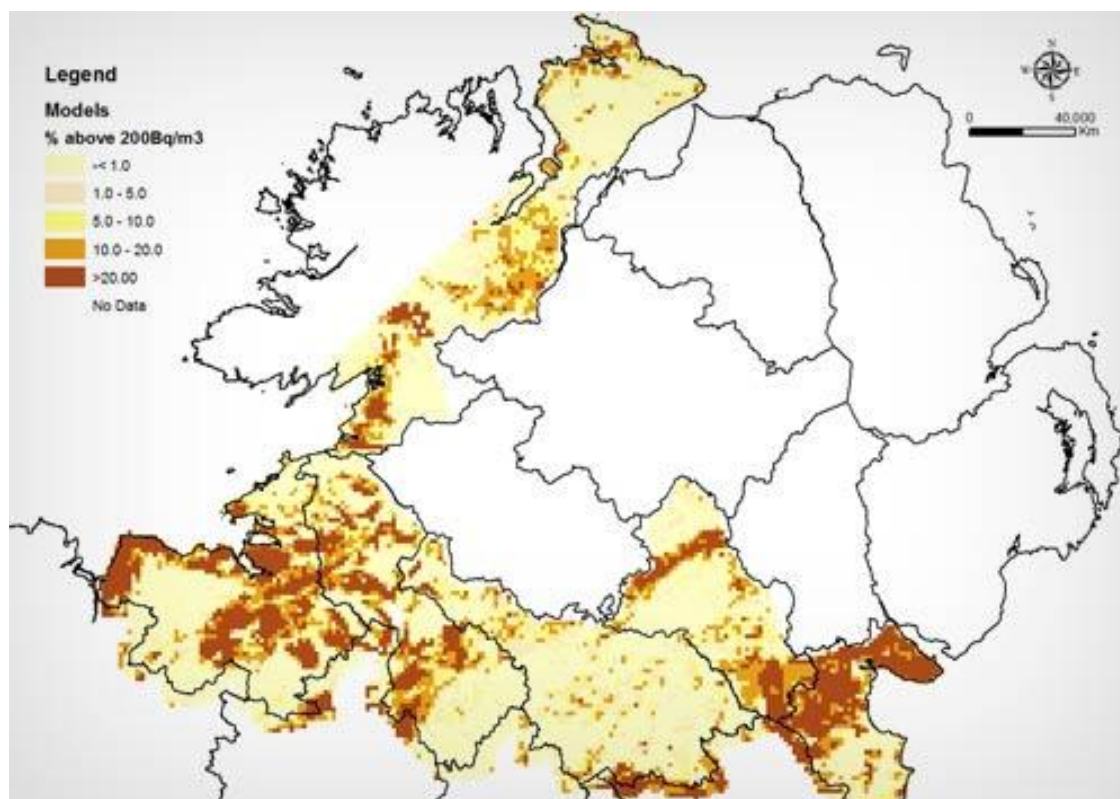
Figure 3-31: High-Risk Radon Emission Areas[39]

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a high-risk radon emissions area is an area where radon gas emissions exceed the reference level exposure (200 becquerels per cubic metre (Bq/m3)) in 10% or more of homes in an area. The Radon Map produced by the EPA provides an indication on the percentage of homes in a 10km² grid with radon exposure above the reference level, as shown in Figure 3-32.

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[39] Image Source: Geological Survey Ireland. https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/programmes-and-projects/tellus/research/Pages/Radon.aspx
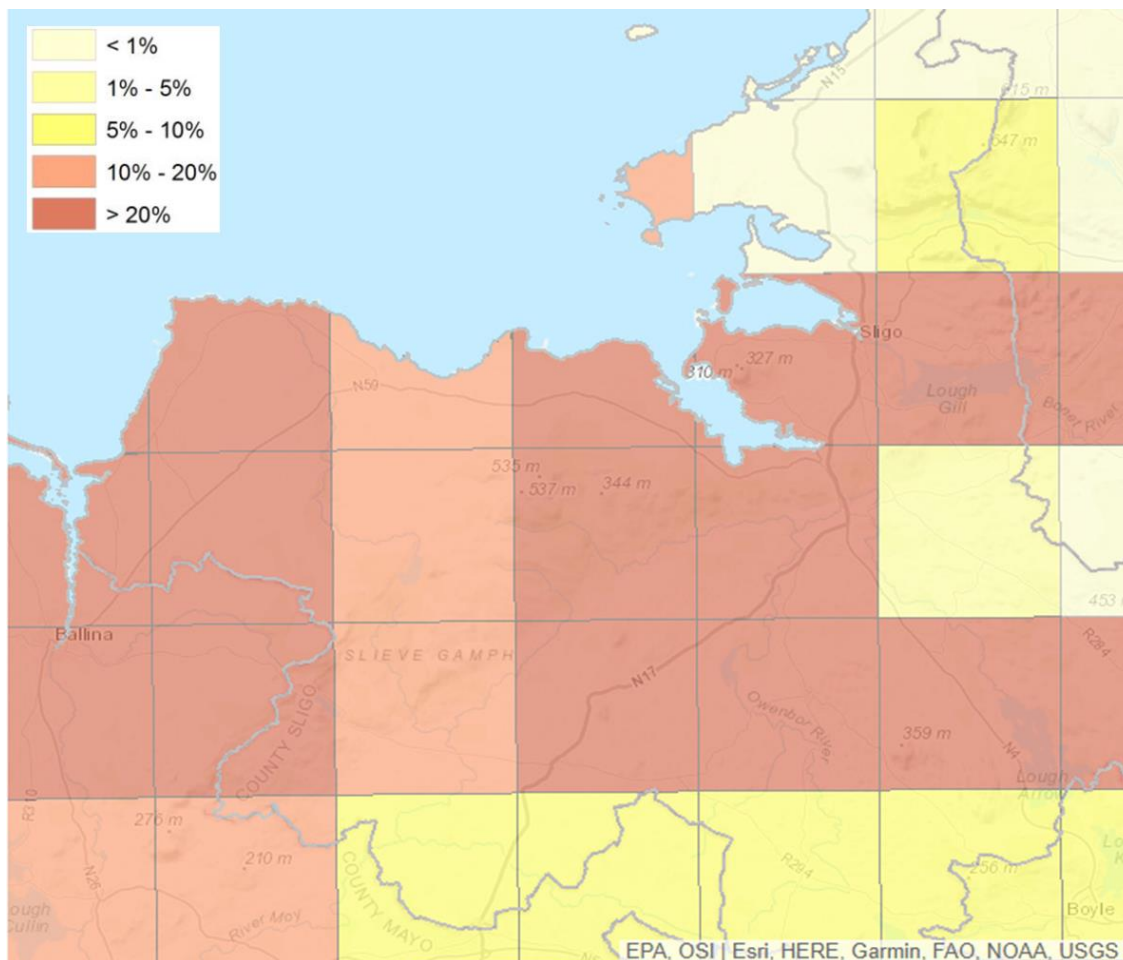
Figure 3-32: County Sligo Radon Map[40]

As seen in the figure above, approximately 50-55% of the County has areas where more than 20% of homes are exposed to radon gas that exceed the reference level. Another approximately 30-35% of the County area has areas where 5-10% of homes are exposed to radon gas over the reference level. These high exposure rates could lead to further increases in cancer cases in Sligo if buildings are not properly protected using preventative measures such as radon membranes and standby radon sumps.

3.8   Theme 7: Tourism

Tourism figures for County Sligo have shown a steady increase over the decade from 2010 to 2019. As seen in the figure and table below, domestic tourist trips to Sligo (by Irish residents) have contributed on average to 2.7% of all domestic tourism trips in Ireland, with a sharp increase in the number of trips seen between 2017 and 2019.

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[40] Image Source: EPA
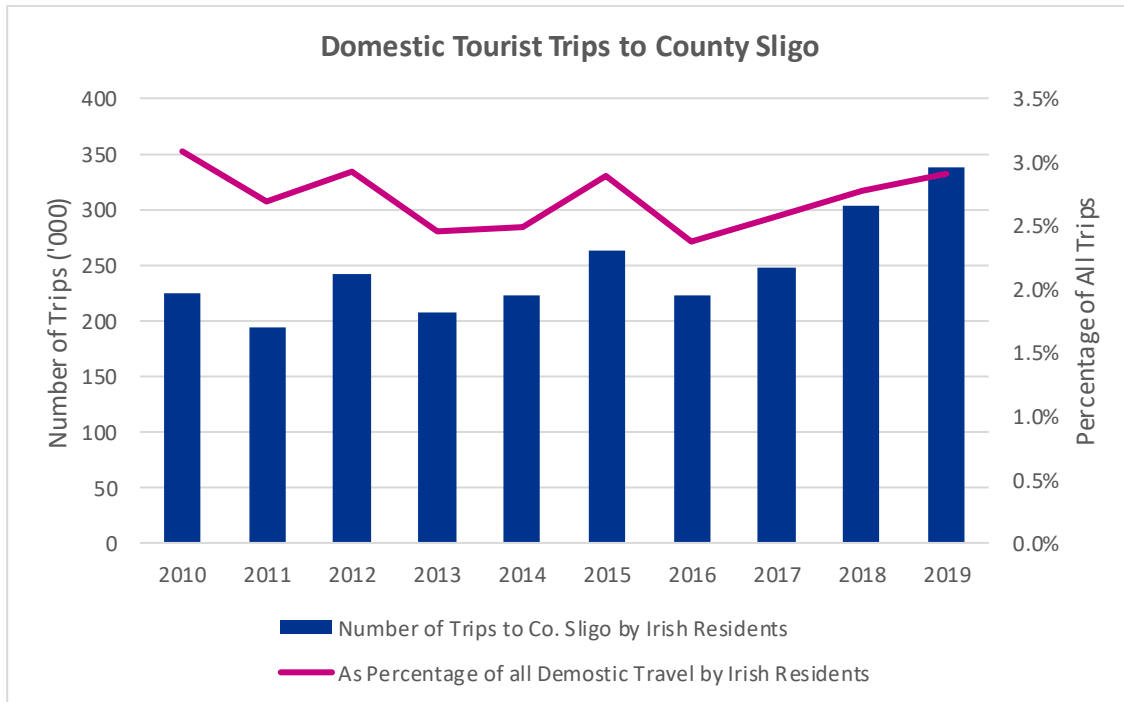
Figure 3-33: Domestic Tourist Trips to County Sligo

Table 3-26: Domestic Tourism Trips to County Sligo (2017-2019)

	2017	2018	2019
Number of visitors to Co Sligo	247,000	303,000	337,000
% of all domestic trips in Ireland	2.7%	2.8%	2.9%

Although domestic tourism to Sligo increased by 22.7% from 2017-2018 and by another 11.2% from 2018-2019, the County received just under 3% of all domestic tourism in Ireland. At regional level, County Sligo is the second highest recipient of domestic travel trips, with an overall average of 25.4% from 2010 to 2019, although the figure has declined slightly to an average of 25.2% from 2017 to 2019. Figure 3-34 provides an overview of domestic travel trips to Sligo in comparison to other counties in the Region.
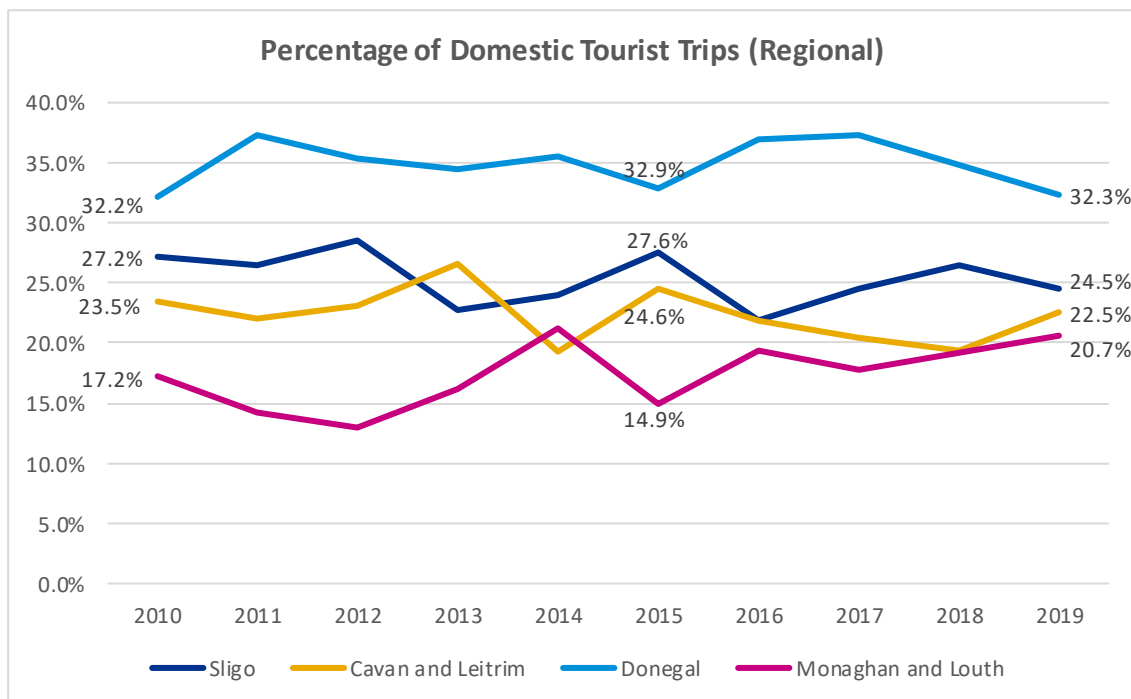
Figure 3-34: Percentage of Domestic Tourist Trips (Regional, 2010 - 2019)

International tourism figures for County Sligo also indicate an increase in visitors to the County, as seen in the table below.

Table 3-27: International Visitors to County Sligo

	2017	2019	Increase
Number of international visitors to Co Sligo	173,000	193,480	11.8%
All inward international visitors to Ireland	17,076,026	18,903,470	10.7%
% of all international trips to Sligo	1.01%	1.02%	

International visitor numbers to the Northern and Western area are further examined through the number of incoming visitors at Shannon International Airport, Ireland West Airport Knock, and Donegal Airport. Figure 3-35 presents the number of incoming international visitors through these airports over a five-year period from 2015-2019.

Regional Airport Arriving International Passanger Figures
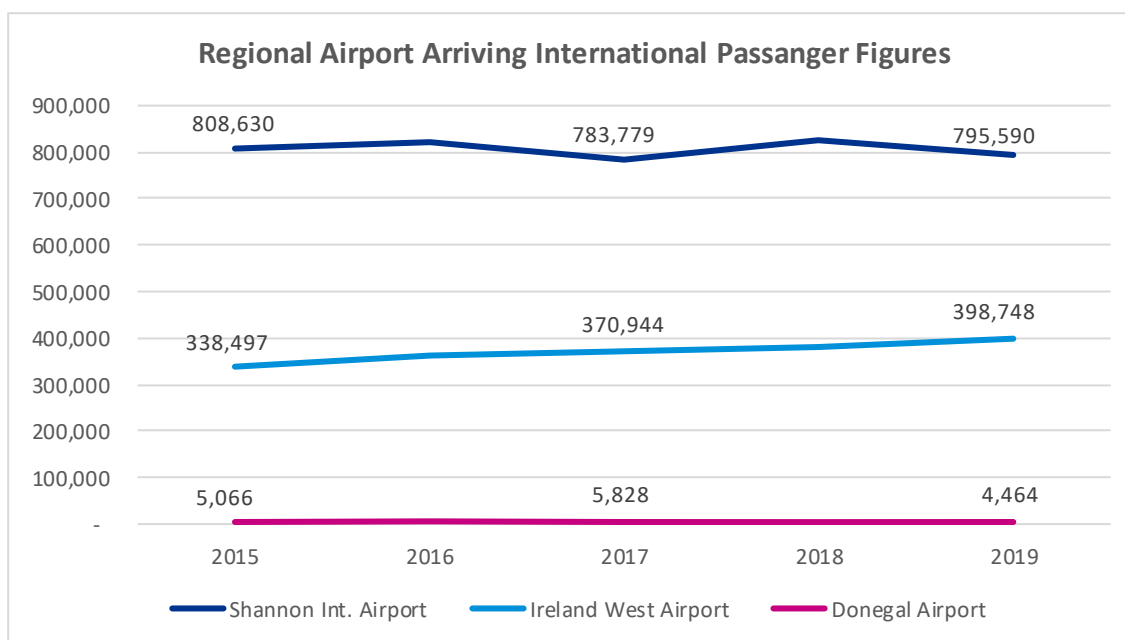
Figure 3-35: Number of Arriving International Passengers to Regional Airports

Ireland West Airport Knock has seen a steady increase of 18% in incoming international passengers and is also the closest international airport to Sligo Town (within 60km). Although the international arrival passenger figures for Shannon International Airport have been relatively stable, and with a slight decline in arrivals to Donegal Airport, there was an overall increase in arrivals between these airports of 4%. The increase in overall visitors to the region, and specific increase in visitors to Sligo show the economic value and potential of the tourism sector in the County.

In the future, Sligo's cultural offering must become stronger and more diverse as the County seeks to attract increased visitor numbers and an internationally mobile workforce. By doing so, the County Council will also strive to protect and develop Sligo's distinctive character and identity.

3.9   Theme 8: The Environment and Climate Change

This section deals with the environment, climate change and sustainability in Sligo. It relates directly to a number of the Sustainable Development Goals including Goal 7 Affordable and Clean Energy, Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, Goal 13 focusing on Climate Action, Goal 14 on Life Below Water and Goal 15 on Life on Land. It provides an overview of the conservation areas in Sligo and its rich natural landscape. These areas provide the community with the opportunity to avail of the health benefits of interacting with the natural environment and in doing so assists in improving the overall quality of life in Sligo. This section also provides an overview of Sligo's climate adaption strategy, associated green infrastructure and sustainability initiatives related

to agriculture, green enterprise, and the circular economy. This includes mapping of cycle ways, renewable energy sources and electric vehicle charging points.

3.9.1 Climate Change

The 13th Goal of UN Sustainable Development Goals[41] aims at tackling the increasing threat posed by Climate Change. Under this Goal, countries across the world are urged to implement mitigation strategies which will strengthen their resilience and adaption to changing climates. The UN asks that these changes be inserted into national polices and strategies. In Ireland this policy is led by the Climate Action Plan published in 2019[42]. This plan sets out approaches which will be undertaken by stakeholders to protect the local environment, such as a five-year Carbon Budget and Sectoral Targets approach, consisting of detailed plans aimed at their objective delivery.

The action plan is governed by a Delivery Board overseen by the Department of the Taoiseach to ensure delivery of the necessary changes. Under the Climate Action Plan an independent Climate Action Council has been established as a successor to the national Climate Change Advisory Council. This new Council recommends the Carbon Budget and evaluates policy, which facilitates strong accountability to an Oireachtas Climate Action Committee that carbon-proofs all Government decisions and major investments. By adopting a climate adaption strategy which aims at following these national guidelines, Sligo County Council aims at providing mitigation actions to local areas threatened by extreme climatic events and to help local communities plan and phase the changes needed in order to adapt to the measures outlined in Government policy.

3.9.1.1 *Climate Adaptation Strategy*

With projections for an increasing population that is more connected to and interacts more regularly with the local environment, Sligo County Council recognises that climate change must be considered as a priority. With an increase in the frequency of climate related events such as flooding, wind and rainstorms, as well as rising temperatures, the Council has developed a Climate Adaption Strategy.[43] The strategy aims to mitigate the impacts from larger events while also adapting to the steady changes in climate conditions. The approach uses data from past events and observes the mitigation plans which were implemented to understand how to best preserve and protect the local communities and businesses most at risk during these events.

Using freely available EU data and projections, the strategy aims to help local officials protect services which are supplied to settlements and rural populations. The adaption plan was launched in 2019 and will be in place until 2024. The first phase of the strategy's approach engages stakeholders to enhance local understanding of the risks which the County will face. By adopting a collaborative approach between stakeholders

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[41] United Nations Sustainable Development Goals available at: https://sdgs.un.org/goals
[42] Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019 available at:
https://assets.gov.ie/10206/d042e174c1654c6ca14f39242fb07d22.pdf
[43] Climate Ready Sligo available at: https://www.sligococo.ie/corporateplan/ClimateAdaptationStrategy.pdf

on how best to adapt preventative measures, the strategy is inclusive of all the community as well as the relevant bodies of the Local Authority. During the second phase, further information and education is provided on how the climate is changing and the identification of risks to help inform the planning and decision-making process. Finally, once risks are identified, responses are developed, coordinated, and implemented by the Local Authority to defend local communities and environmental resources.

Figure 3-36: County Sligo Climate Adaptation Strategy Approach[44]

3.9.2 Conservation Areas

Sligo offers a wide range of activities that allow for a healthy quality of life and interaction with the landscape, with 14 special protected areas, 27 special areas of conservation and 4 national heritage areas. Taken as a whole, these areas constitute 20% of the County being designated for nature conservation. Sligo's rich landscape is also home to over 5,000 recorded archaeological sites and the Sligo Neolithic Passage Tombs are currently seeking UNESCO World Heritage Status. In relation to the natural environment, the Sligo Walks initiative[45]   aims to improve the walking infrastructure throughout Sligo with a number of projects targeted at allowing more of the community to interact with the local environment and enhance rural quality of life. Another initiative

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[44] Source: Co. Sligo Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024
[45] Sligo Walks Initiative available at: https://sligowalks.ie/funding-announced-for-sligo-walks-projects/

which can also benefit the local and regional community is the planned development of the Sligo Greenway from Collooney to Bellaghy. The Sligo Greenway Co-Op Ltd noted in a 2018 feasibility report that this project could provide a sustainable, scenic, and safe, walking and cycling route. Such greenway facilities on decommissioned rail lines offer an environmentally sustainable method for recreation with little impact on the environment and local rural community.
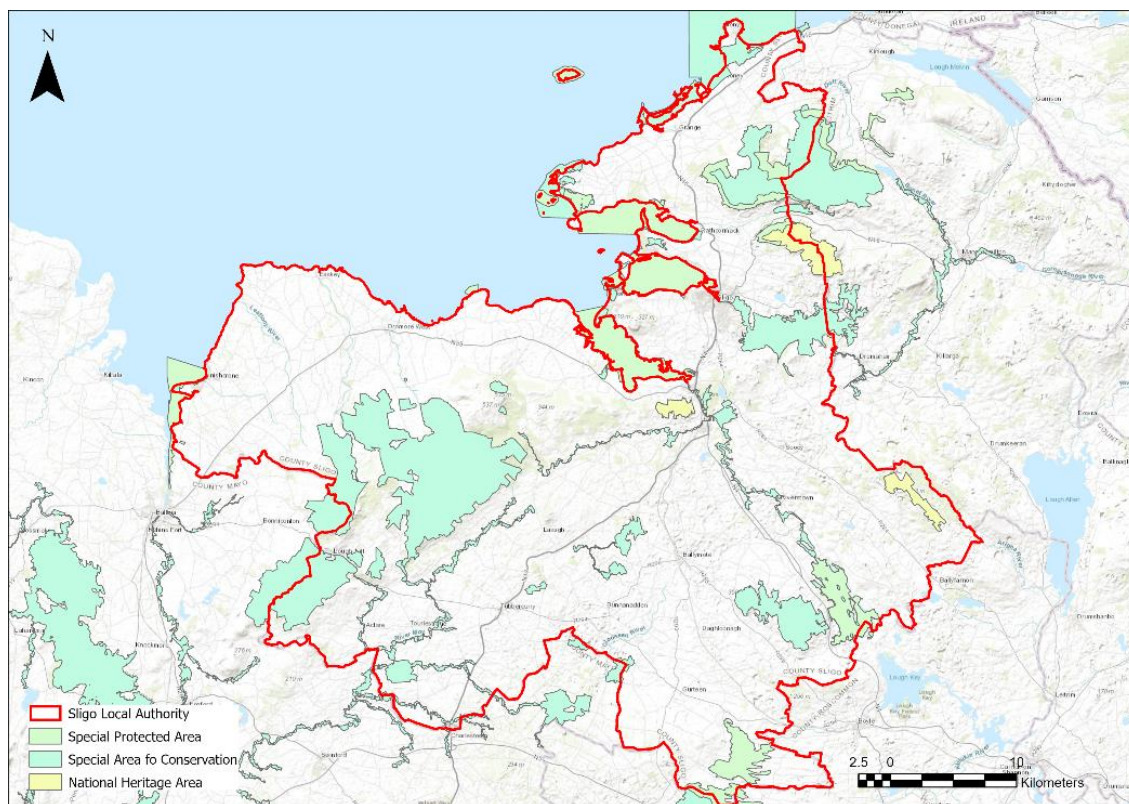

Figure 3-37: Protected, Conservation and Heritage Areas in County Sligo
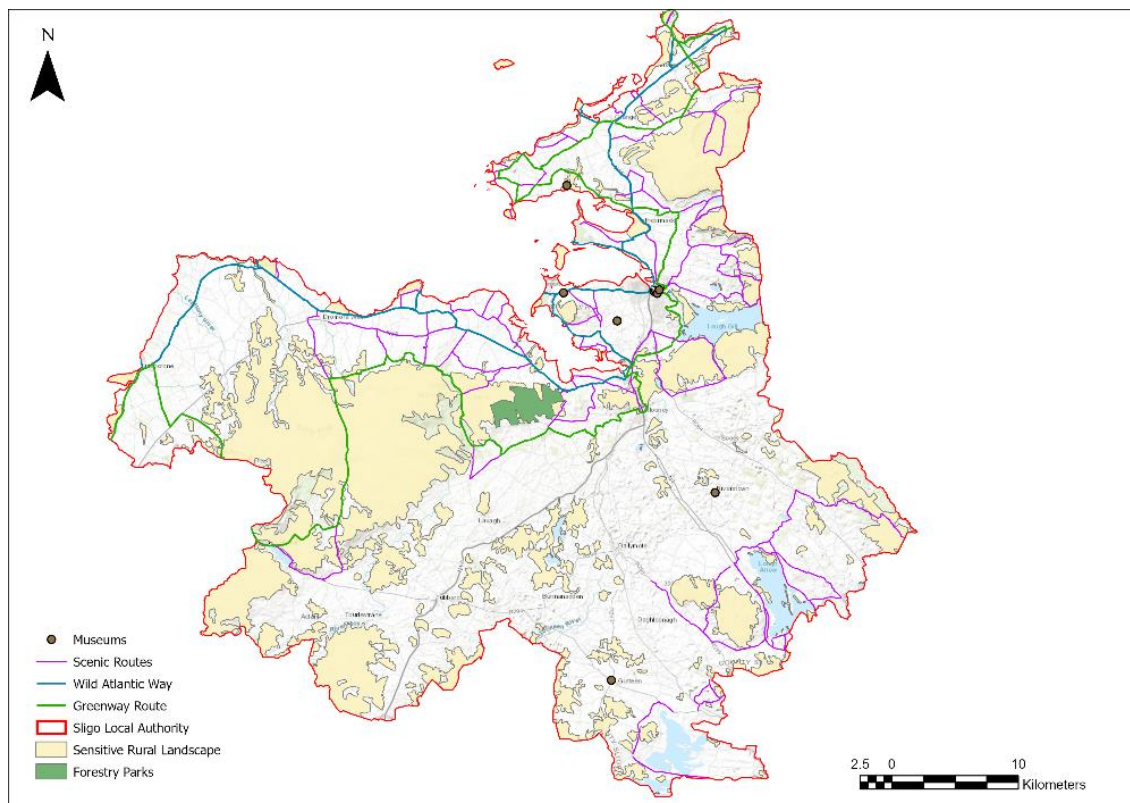
Figure 3-38: Recreation and Greenway Facilities in County Sligo

3.9.3 Renewable Energy

The Climate Action Plan outlines that national reliance on renewables needs to increase from 30% to 70%, adding 12GW of renewable energy capacity annually to the national grid. This increase will also replace the production of electricity produced from peat and coal plants, with plans in place to permanently close both types of fossil fuel producing plants. An option to meet this increased target is the delivering of renewable energy by private contracts.

To target small scale production, the government hopes to implement a supported scheme for micro-generation with price provisions implemented, enabling power to be sold to the grid.

The plan also recommends an opportunity for climate stakeholders to participate in renewable generation with the implementation of community gain arrangements. In order to create these changes, the current grid system must therefore be evaluated and streamlined. Required improvements must be made to funding supports for new technologies on and offshore to come online to the power grid.

3.9.3.1   Wind Power
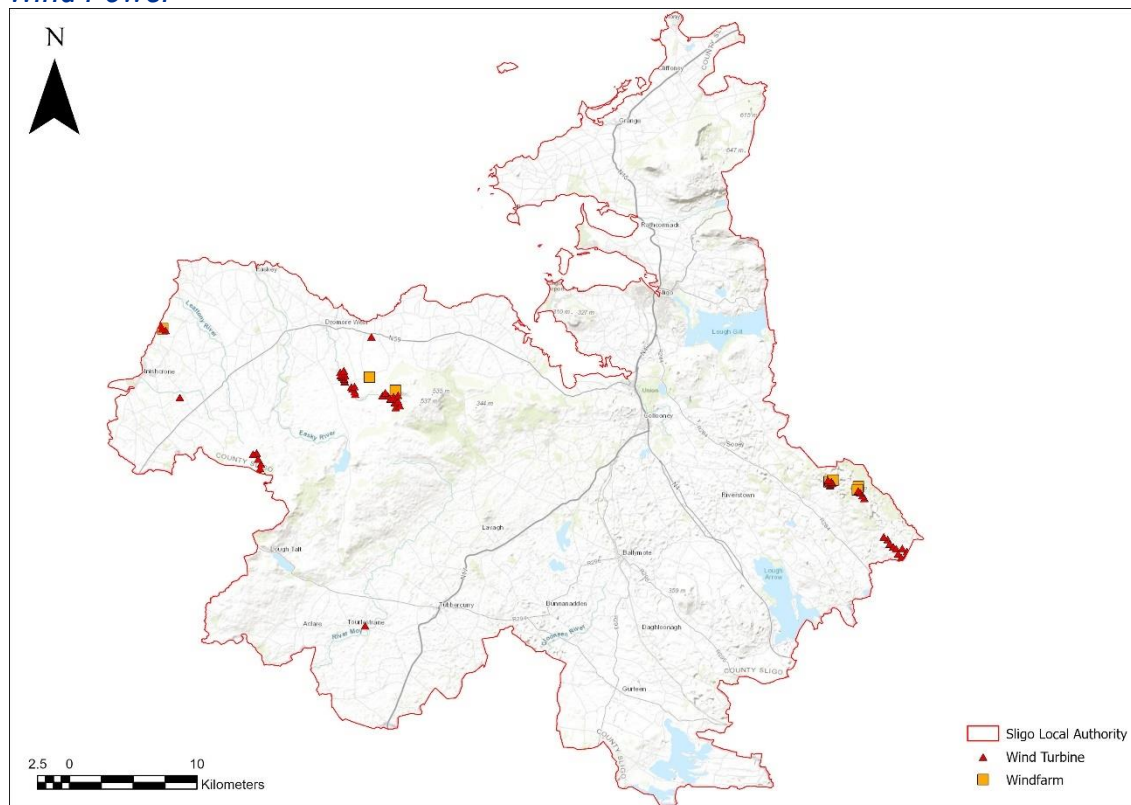
Figure 3-39: Location of Windfarm and Wind turbines in Sligo

A total of 48 wind turbines are situated in County Sligo. As outlined in the Climate Action Plan for 2019, electricity production accounted for 19.3% of Ireland's greenhouse gases in 2017, decreasing from 20.4% in 2016. An objective of the Climate Action Plan is the decarbonisation of electricity production and significant generation of power from renewable sources of energy. 30% of the electricity produced in Ireland in 2017 was from renewable energy sources. Despite this high figure, Ireland's electricity emissions in 2016 were 13% higher per capita in comparison to other EU member states, which can be contributed in part to the greater use of high-carbon fuels such as coal and peat.

To meet the targeted level of emissions by 2030, Ireland has pledged to reduce CO2 emissions from the electricity production sector, phasing out fossil fuel electricity production and increasing renewable electricity generation by 70%. Sligo has the potential to contribute to this renewable energy objective, with an expected demand of up to 3.5GW of offshore renewable energy required. The current Sligo network of wind turbines has capacity to generate between 0.85 – 2.5MW of energy per turbine. If Sligo's network was to be increased, it could contribute further to meeting the national target of generating 8.2GW of electricity through onshore wind power.
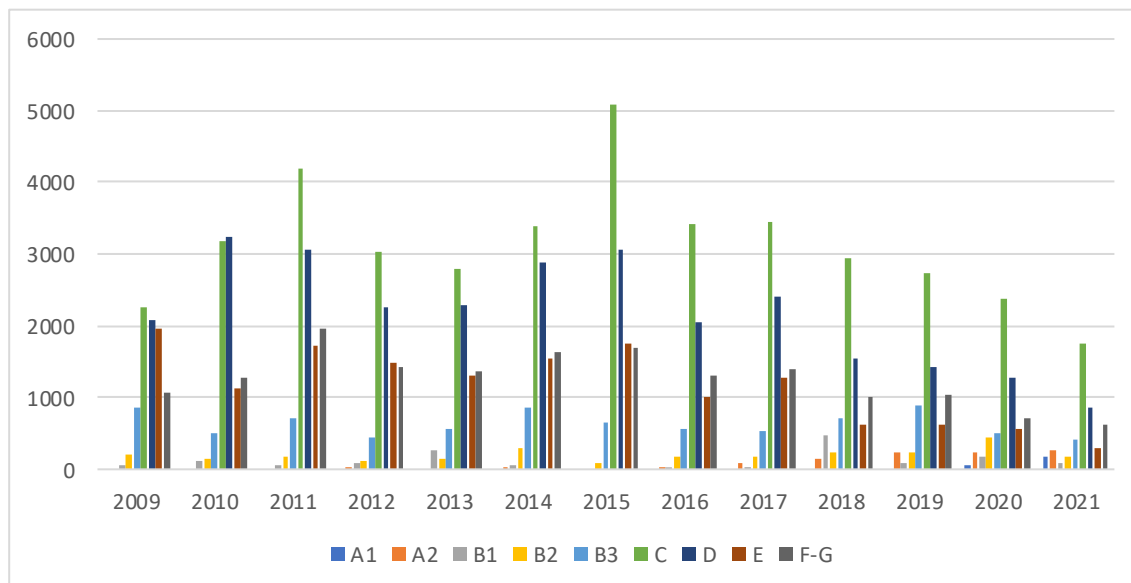
3.9.4 Building Energy Ratings

Figure 3-40 Sligo Building Energy Ratings 2009 - 2021

One of the main targets under the Climate Action plan which the government hopes to implement is the improving of stricter building requirements for new builds and large refurbishments. To limit the impacts of individual resourcing from single projects the Government aims to create a supply chain which will aggregate home retrofits allowing for high levels of construction activity to be funded and delivered simultaneously in a specific area. Through the creation of a roadmap, combined resourcing will also deliver key utilities such as the potential for District Heating.[46] Increased attention will be given to the energy and carbon ratings of buildings, with policy planned to move over 500,000 existing homes to upgraded B2 Building Energy Ratings, with 400,000 of these homes targeted for the installation of heat pumps. Sligo contained 4,756 registered BER properties in 2021, with 3.87% of these properties contain a rating of B2. This is a decrease of 5.15% since 2009. The County's largest BER category is C accounting for 36.67% of properties, however, this category has also seen a decrease of 23.24% since 2009. The fastest growing category is A3 with 120 properties recorded in 2021.

3.9.5 Sustainable Mobility

3.9.5.1 Vehicle Recharge Points
As outlined in Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019,[47] a target of having 950,000 electric vehicles on Irish roads has been set for 2030, which means 100% of all new cars and

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[46] District Heating Potential - https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/abe7a-geothermal-energy-in-ireland-a-roadmap-for-a-policy-and-regulatory-framework/
[47] Climate Action Plan - https://assets.gov.ie/10206/d042e174c1654c6ca14f39242fb07d22.pdf

vans will be electrically powered by that year. This transition will be reinforced with better planning of national logistics and an increased level of working from home, reducing private and public transport users.

With larger vehicles there will be an increase on renewable biofuels to move away from large consumptions of fossil fuels, this will also be implemented with an evaluation of public transport fleets and setting of targets to create zero carbon options.

In Sligo there are a total of 9 electric vehicle charging sites. These points are operated and maintained by the ESB and are part of their 1,350-point national network. There is an uneven distribution of points within Sligo County with 2 charging sites offering single sockets located on the grounds of the Radisson Blue hotel in Ballincar. Another 2 chargers are available at the Sligo Park Hotel supplying Type 2 sockets of 7.4kW of power. In the south of the County, the only ESB supplied chargers are in the towns of Collooney and Tubbercurry.
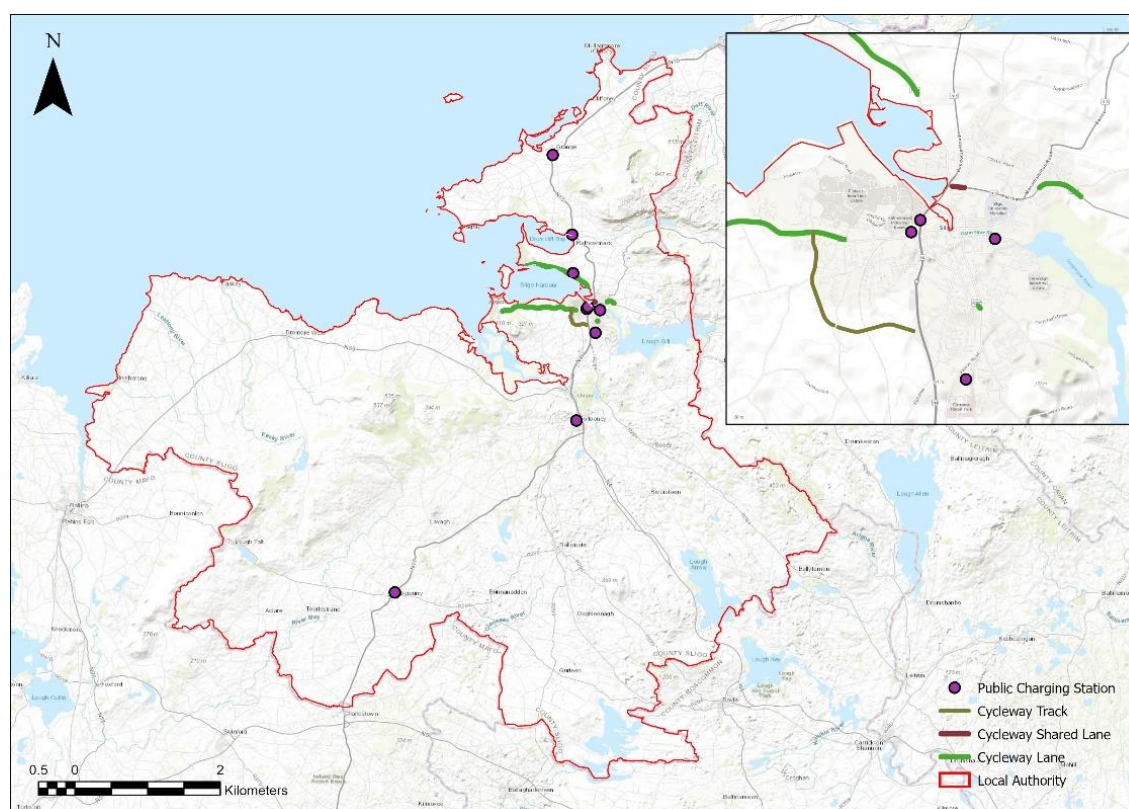
Figure 3-41: Public EV Charging Stations and Cycle Ways in County Sligo

Under the Climate Action Fund established under the National Development Plan 2018 – 2027, funds have been allocated to a series of initiatives which will contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate energy targets. The ESB has been granted €10m in funding with another €10m being supplied from within the organisation to expand and upgrade the public charging network for electric vehicles across Ireland. This expansion will hope to meet the expected growth in demand for electric vehicle charging points and offer more opportunities for electric vehicle sales. The project will consist of 3 stages, each focusing on different upgrades to the network such as:

- Adding over 50 charging hubs throughout Ireland which can charge between 3-8 vehicles simultaneously
- The replacement of 50 (AC) chargers with fast (DC) chargers
- The replacement of over 200 unreliable standard (AC) chargers.

Sligo will benefit from the second phase of this project with the replacement of a standard (AC) charger on Union Place with a fast (DC) charger. However, overall the County still requires an increase in the allocation of electric vehicle charging points to meet Ireland's target to have 100% of all new cars and vans being electrically powered by 2030.

As of August 2021, Sligo has availed of the EU INTEREG Facilitating A Sustainable Transition to EV's in Regions (FASTER) project.[48] This €6.4 million funded project aims to decrease the impact of fossil fuels and transport emissions by delivering 73 new publicly accessible rapid charging points in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Border Region in Ireland. In Sligo the FASTER project is currently identifying locations across the county to install the chargers over 2022.

3.9.5.2 Cycling

To encourage a more sustainable Sligo, sustainable and active mobility must also be improved. As stated above, cycling in 2016 constituted 1% of transport for those attending education or work and only 2% in Sligo Town. This trend is also replicated in regional travel with only 1% of the population using cycling as a form of transport. To improve the number of cyclists throughout Sligo, better infrastructure must be developed as it is quite difficult on the existing road network due to the high number of car users. Sligo launched an Urban Cycling Strategy in 2012 which enhanced commuter cycle lanes and off-road pathways and increased bike parking stands. The 2017 County Development Plan also outlined that an updated strategy must be further developed to promote the use of sustainable transport modes and provide funding to improve the local road network for cyclists.

Under a new Cycling Strategy currently being developed, specific routes will be targeted using a phased approach to update roads which experience cycle traffic. As outlined in the County Development Plan, new infrastructure developments moving forward will make provision for cycle lanes. This can be seen on the new Western Distributor Road project, which has a new 2-metre-wide cycleway on each side of the carriageway. Furthermore, under the new Cycling Strategy, the additions of cycle lanes will link to residential areas and key amenities such as leisure facilities, schools, churches, hospitals, workplaces, recreational areas, colleges and more.

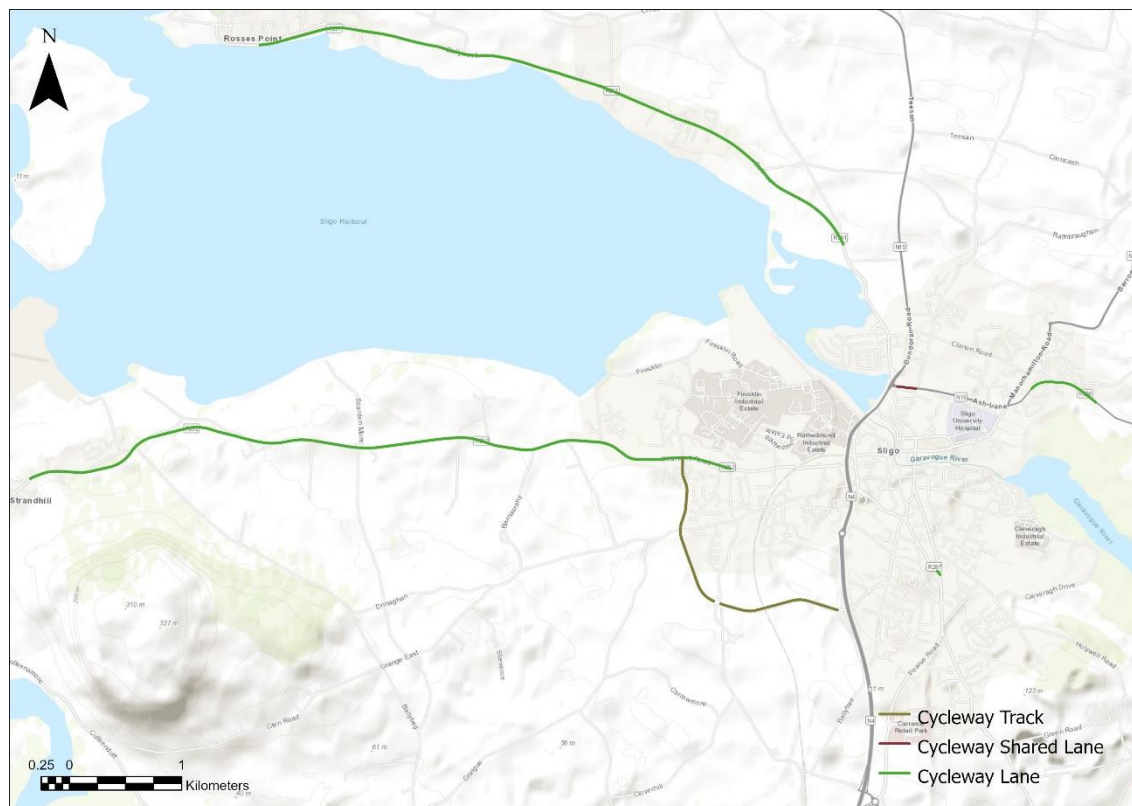[48] Facilitating A Sustainable Transition to EV's in Regions (FASTER)

Figure 3-42: Public Cycle Ways in County Sligo

However, outside of Sligo Town, the cycle infrastructure is limited, especially in other Support Towns with cyclists using the road network alongside car and bus users which poses difficulties and dangers for cyclists. Under the NTA's Active Travel Investment Programme funding has been approved for a 5-year period totalling €70 million. This programme will improve cycling infrastructure not only in Sligo Town but also in Support Towns and rural villages and will assist with the development of a new Sligo Cycling Strategy. This funding will build upon the existing cycle infrastructure, with €400,000 being made available for cycling schemes throughout the County. The funding also covers an educational programme which will encourage students and pupils to cycle, while also raising awareness of required safety procedures while travelling. As stated in Section 3.8, another initiative which will impact the transport infrastructure of County Sligo is the proposed Walking/Cycling Scheme from Sligo Technical University to Hyde Bridge.

Table 3-28: Characteristics of Cyclists in County Sligo

	Safer cycling routes	Better health	More cycling specific routes	Better cycling storage facilities at destinations[1]	Shorter destinations	Easier access to own or use a bike	Access to changing facilities at destinations[2]	Easier access to wet weather clothing	More functional bike design[3]	A more fashionable image	Other	None
All Persons	**31.7**	**20.5**	**17.3**	**5.7**	**4.8**	**4.6**	**2.5**	**2.0**	**1.9**	**0.4**	**2.4**	**40.3**
Male												
18-24	38.5	16.8	20.1	7.9	14.5	10.5	3.2	5.4	2.6	0.9	1.0	22.8
25-34	43.5	25.0	31.7	13.0	9.2	9.0	5.8	4.6	3.8	0.0	2.3	21.2
35-44	44.3	21.7	23.1	12.8	9.1	6.6	5.9	2.9	4.1	0.0	2.8	24.0
45-54	45.2	24.5	28.7	7.9	8.9	3.4	4.8	3.2	1.5	0.0	2.1	28.0
55-64	32.0	21.6	12.1	6.9	4.6	2.6	2.9	0.7	0.7	0.4	3.7	36.8
65-74	29.5	29.9	15.0	3.9	0.9	2.6	0.4	0.9	0.7	1.6	2.8	41.5
75+	10.9	30.3	6.2	0.9	1.8	1.1	0.8	1.5	0.9	0.9	0.3	54.5
Female												
18-24	33.4	20.5	17.1	9.0	9.5	2.9	6.3	6.3	5.4	1.1	3.6	32.9
25-34	42.4	19.0	21.9	6.6	6.4	13.9	1.5	3.0	1.7	0.4	2.2	31.0
35-44	35.5	16.8	24.4	6.9	6.5	7.2	3.6	3.3	4.1	0.7	3.9	36.7
45-54	39.0	16.1	21.3	4.9	3.7	4.3	2.0	1.6	1.9	0.0	3.6	39.2
55-64	31.6	18.9	15.1	5.0	2.7	3.2	2.1	0.4	1.5	0.3	2.8	44.2
65-74	16.2	13.7	7.2	1.1	0.6	2.1	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.0	1.3	59.6
75+	10.6	17.6	4.2	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	63.8

3.9.6   Sustainable Agriculture

As stated in the Sligo Climate Adaption Strategy "The changes in temperature and rainfall and increase in extreme weather events will have a significant effect on agriculture". The Ireland 2030 plan aims to deliver a number of methods to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions produced from agriculture by adopting a range of improved farming practices recommended by Teagasc. Ireland is required to deliver a 20% reduction in non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (relative to 2005 levels). Objectives consist of expanding forestry planting and soil management to ensure that carbon emissions from land-use are reduced over the period 2021 to 2030. The plan also sets out supports on diversification within agricultural and land use practices while developing new sustainable and circular produced resources. Agricultural business models will also be adapted for lower carbon intensity farming with higher emphasis on organic production, increased protection and enhancement of biodiversity and higher water quality standards. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will be used as a framework for the production of bio-based products and bioenergy, with the National Policy Statement on the bioeconomy implementing these CAP guidelines. The above polices will impact over 2,000 households in Sligo who were recorded as belonging to an agricultural socio-economic group in Census 2016. Similarly, 1,500 of Sligo's population recorded being directly employed in agricultural related occupations.

3.9.7   Sustainable Green Enterprises

The Climate Adaption plan also identifies the need for enterprises to improve energy efficiency with the replacement of fossil fuels and careful management of materials and waste produced for product production. Carbon emissions are also to be targeted across all enterprises and public service bodies. This will be carried out by mobilising clusters regionally and by sector to become centres of excellence for the adoption of low carbon technologies. This is currently being implemented in Sligo by the Local Enterprise Office who have launched a programme which can enhance sustainable practices for small businesses. With support from Enterprise Ireland, this nationwide initiative will help to prepare small businesses for a low carbon, more resource efficient economy in the future. The programme assigns a Green Consultant to each business to provide free technical support in areas such as resource efficiency management and how to reduce their carbon footprint. Implementation includes adopting an environmental management system to reduce costs and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

3.9.8   Waste and the Circular Economy

The EU defines the circular economy as "a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing

materials and products as long as possible".[49] Ireland's national Climate Action Plan stipulates that coherent strategies must be developed to reduce the production of plastics and food waste and increase efficiency in resource use. This in turn will increase recycling levels with less availability of single use materials. In Sligo the SYMBIOMA[50] project aims at targeting the circular transformation of waste materials for the production of new products which can make a contribution to economic development and local innovation in rural areas. The objectives of the project are to first create a technology platform which operates as a multidisciplinary service. This platform will then develop a service portfolio for local SMEs to research and develop opportunities within the circular economy. SYMBIOMA staff will then provide upskilling to stakeholders to enhance understanding of circular economic opportunities and services available on its Technology Innovation Platform.

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[49] See: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20151201STO05603/circular-economy-definition-importance-and-benefits
[50] See: https://www.itsligo.ie/research/collaborative-projects/symbioma/

4

CONSULTATION
FINDINGS

4   Consultation Findings

Over the course of June and July 2021, an extensive consultation process was undertaken with stakeholders from across the general public, community representative groups, local government, state agencies, education providers and the private sector. This included a public webinar, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, a survey aimed at the private sector and a survey for the wider community, as well as written submissions. The engagement in relation to the consultation was as follows:

- 171 responses to the community survey
- 82 people engaged over the course of 5 Focus Group sessions
- 75 individuals attended the public webinar, which was online, open and free to join
- 63 written submissions including from the general public, community representative groups, and a wide range of other stakeholders including the diaspora.
- 47 responses to the Business Survey
- 21 Stakeholder interviews were conducted across an array of stakeholders including from local community groups, private sector representatives, semi-state agencies and local and national government.

A summary of the key themes from the consultation sessions, submissions and surveys is outlined below. Note the full list of aggregated findings from both the business and community surveys can be found in Appendix 1.

4.1   Economy, Housing, and Growth

The economy, housing and growth were key interconnected recurring themes that were identified during the consultation process. Some of the key strengths identified over the course of the consultation included the cost of living, business supports and the cost of doing business. Other general strengths include the welcoming business community, the quality of life and the natural beauty of the county which was a great asset not only in relation to the community in general but also for client visits. Sectoral strengths highlighted included the precision engineering industry, the food industry and the emerging pharmaceutical and MedTech sectors with existing clusters. As well as this the importance of the retail and hospitality sector to the economy of both Sligo Town and rural towns and villages was also highlighted.
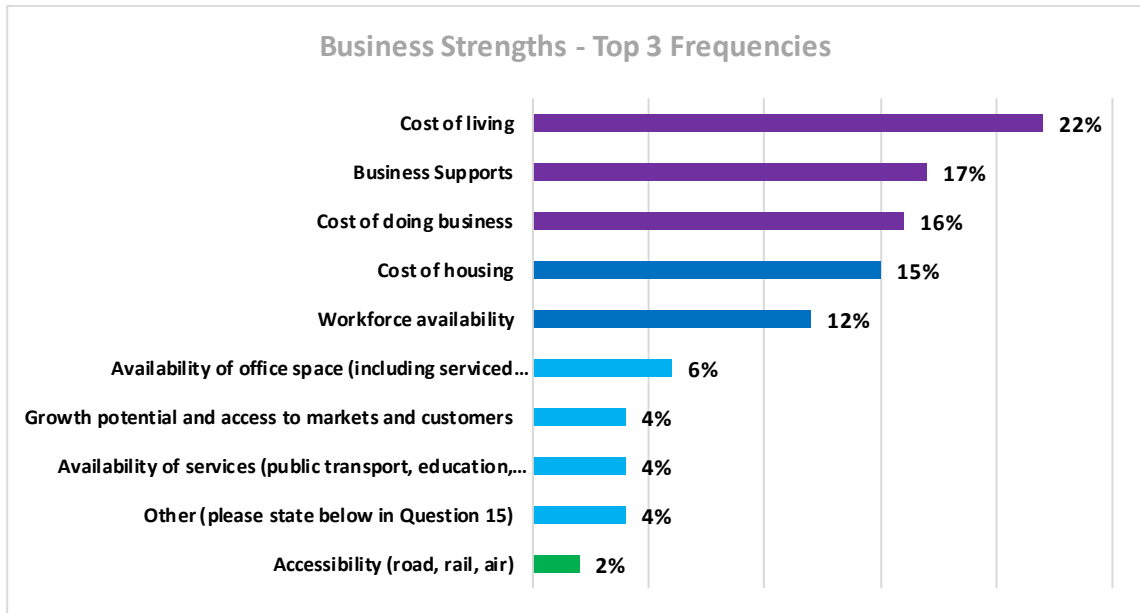
Business Strengths - Top 3 Frequencies

Category	Percentage
Cost of living	22%
Business Supports	17%
Cost of doing business	16%
Cost of housing	15%
Workforce availability	12%
Availability of office space (including serviced…	6%
Growth potential and access to markets and customers	4%
Availability of services (public transport, education,…	4%
Other (please state below in Question 15)	4%
Accessibility (road, rail, air)	2%

Figure 4-1: Business Strengths - Top 3 Frequencies

However, one of the key constraints highlighted by both the private sector and the general community was the lack of housing and the quality of the stock that is available both for rental and purchasing. This key issue was a recurring theme that was identified as having a negative impact on Sligo's ability to attract more investment, grow its population and indeed serve its existing community adequately. Similarly, employment opportunities were highlighted as one of the main barriers to attracting people to live and work in Sligo, followed by availability of services. It should be noted that in relation to services, access to healthcare and education and training were ranked by the majority of respondents as being either very good or excellent. As such, the barrier referred to below is related to the provision of public transport, which 44% of respondents ranked poor and another 28% ranked as very poor.

What are the main barriers to people coming to live and work in Sligo? Top 3 Frequencies

Category	Percentage
Availability of housing	23%
Employment opportunities	22%
Accessibility (road, rail, air)	21%
Availability of services (healthcare, education,…	13%
Cost of housing	9%
Attractive public spaces and recreation & leisure…	7%
Cost of living	3%
Other (please state below in Question 12)	2%
Culture, heritage and the arts	0%
Natural environment and landscape	0%

Figure 4-2: Main Barriers for People Coming to Live and Work in Sligo

In relation to looking to key priorities in the coming years, the key areas to address to achieve Sligo's ambitions were highlighted as the creation of more employment and the connected urgent need of addressing the lack of housing being supplied. Without

the housing issue being addressed, it was felt that it would be difficult to attract further investment and increase employment opportunities, which in turn would affect the ability of Sligo to meet its growth ambitions moving forward.

In relation to achieving sustainable economic growth and creating more employment, a number of ideas were put forward. The role of the likes of IT Sligo, St Angela's and the ETB in creating the talent base to meet employer needs and upskilling the community to prepare Sligo for the jobs of the future was seen as a key element to be continued and built upon. The creation of the Technological University was seen as a very positive development in this regard with the potential for increased collaboration between industry and academia with a related uptick in R&D output.

Similarly, the role that tourism could play in creating a prosperous economy was also highlighted. Sligo's rich natural landscape, heritage and culture were frequently identified as some of the key strengths of the County. However, it was felt that Sligo was still not realising its full potential in relation to tourism and that a number of opportunities exist in this area. Key to realising the County's full potential was a more coordinated approach across key stakeholders. Opportunities exist across a range of areas from outdoor activities and festivals to enhanced business and coach tourism.

Other areas of potential included the development of a local gas network, the opportunity for offshore wind power, further development of tech clusters, the opportunity to increase entrepreneurship and highlight the success of Sligo's indigenous companies and the opportunities and efficiencies that could be achieved through becoming a smart county and living lab.

4.2   Transport

As can be seen in the above chart (Figure 4-2), the accessibility of Sligo and transport options were also identified as key issues to address by respondents to the surveys, both from the private sector and the community. As a county in a peripheral location in the North West, improving accessibility was seen to be key to attracting visitors, investment and growing the population. This included access to Sligo by air, land and rail. Notwithstanding the upgrades made to date, specific areas to address included further improvements to the N4 to Dublin, N17 to Galway, N15 to Donegal and N16 to Enniskillen. The importance of the rail network was also highlighted with ideas put forward around electrification and the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor. Enhanced promotion, awareness, and linkages with Ireland West Airport was also suggested as well as the opportunity to explore potential opportunities around the future uses of Sligo Airport.

Public Transport was highlighted as an area that needs improvement throughout the County, with a particular emphasis placed on improving services to rural areas. Improvements are needed both in terms of expansion to the areas served and the

frequency of the services provided. In relation to this point, there is an opportunity to increase collaboration between public transport providers, employers and the likes of Ireland West Airport to ensure that services align with shifts finishing and scheduled connecting services such as trains, flights and regional and national bus routes.

The consultation also identified a key desire and need for clean, sustainable and active transport and associated infrastructure throughout the Sligo community. A number of submissions as well as points from the focus groups related directly to the development of more cycleways and cycle paths, greenways, and walkways across the county. In relation to such active modes of mobility, there is a need to ensure the safety of the users through numerous different measures. Specific emphasis was given to the need to segregate cycleways and cycle paths from other traffic (both vehicular and pedestrian) and to ensure maintenance of the infrastructure on an ongoing basis. There were also suggestions around an electric fleet for public transport as well as the need for increased charging points for electric vehicles.

4.3   COVID-19 and Brexit

COVID-19 and Brexit were also highlighted as areas for concern during the consultation. The impact of COVID-19 was highlighted in the community survey in relation to the changing working arrangements of respondents, with 33% of respondents highlighting they were now working their normal hours from home and another 23% indicating a potential adoption of a hybrid working model. Furthermore 55% of respondents indicated that they would like a hybrid working model split between their homes and offices, while another 16% indicated that they would like to work from home full time. As such the importance of infrastructure such as broadband and transport links to other major cities is already and will continue to be key enablers for remote and hybrid working.

Similarly, remote working hubs may have a role to play in facilitating hybrid models of working and remote workers, particularly in areas where lack of broadband connectivity may not allow individuals to work from their own homes. However, the demand for these hubs has to be carefully assessed, taking into account workers' potential preferences to work from their own homes and potential requirements by employers for hybrid working that may mean the benefits of remote working could be affected by

lengthy   commutes   to   major   urban   centres   such   as   Dublin.

Changing Work Arrangements Post-COVID

I am working my normal working hours from home — 33%

The nature of my work does not allow me to work from home — 27%

I am working from home part-time — 23%

Other — 9%

I am working from home, but I also worked full or part time from home prior to Covid-19 — 7%
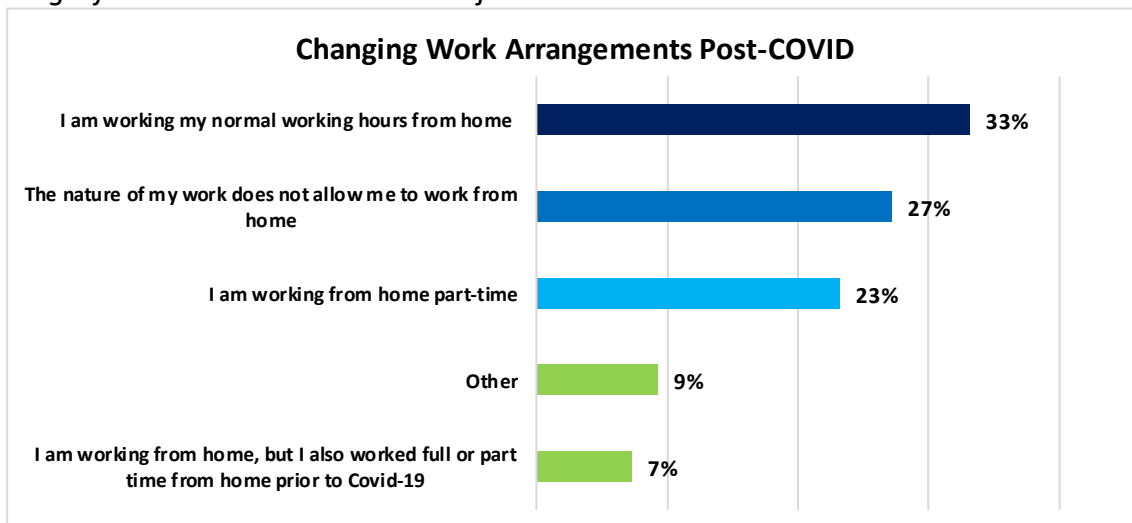
Figure 4-3: Changing Work Arrangements Post-COVID

As shown in the chart below, from a private sector point of view, respondents to the survey indicated that the long-term consequences of COVID-19 and Brexit are key concerns and challenges that businesses in Sligo will face over the next number of years. In relation to expansions and growth 33% of those surveyed indicated that plans to grow or expand their business had been delayed due to COVID-19, while interestingly an equal amount indicated that they have actually achieved growth since the pandemic started. In relation to Brexit, the key concerns mentioned focused on supply chain disruptions (41%), Sligo's proximity to the border and potential trade barriers (26%) and export and import charges (22%). In further comments and discussion, some businesses felt that the true impact of Brexit was yet to be felt and that it was potentially being somewhat masked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Other private sector representatives noted that they were already seeing a decline in business with Northern Ireland and the UK, supply chain issues and in some cases have decided to move away from dealing with UK companies. From a retail point a view, the potential for Northern Ireland to have significantly cheaper goods was highlighted as a concern. As such, it is clear that businesses are being affected in different ways and to different extents by both the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit and therefore, will need assistance in navigating the uncertainty and impact of both.

Business Challenges - Top 3 Frequencies

Challenge	Percentage
Long-term consequences of Covid-19	24%
Brexit	21%
A future recession	14%
Accessibility (road, rail, air)	10%
Workforce availability	8%
Business Supports	7%
Other (please state below in Question 19)	6%
Cost of doing business	5%
Availability of office space (including serviced...	4%
Climate Change	2%
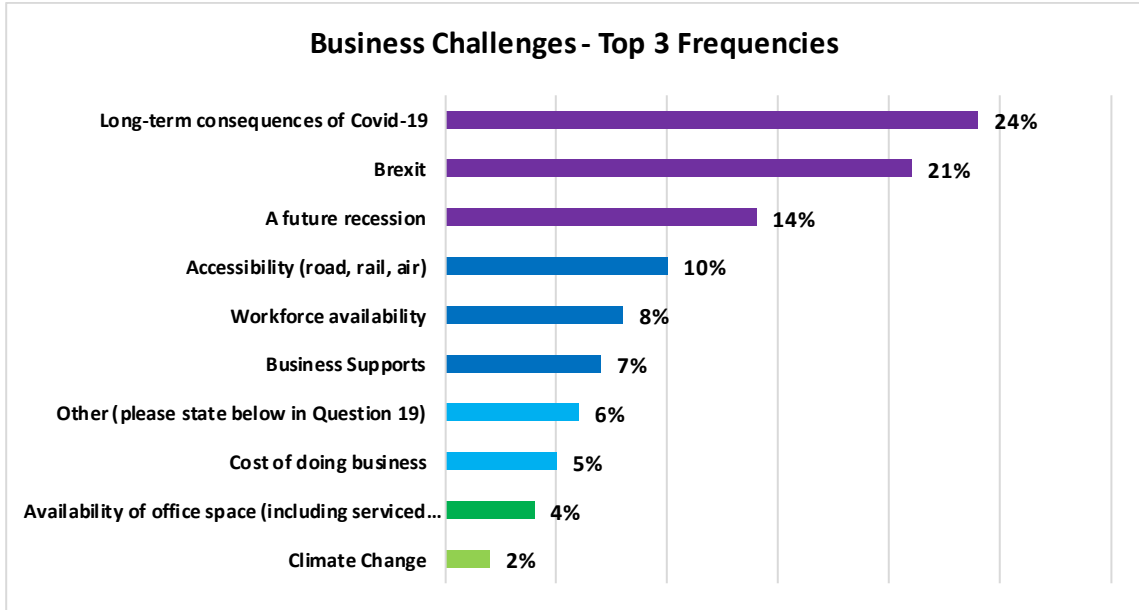
Figure 4-4: Business Challenges

4.4   Climate Change

Climate Change was another key theme identified during the consultation process with 58% of respondents to the community survey indicating that they were concerned about the impact climate change will have on Sligo and another 27% indicating that they were very concerned about the impact. Numerous written submissions and discussions during the consultation process referred to climate change, the Sustainable Development Goals and measures that Sligo needs to take to address the climate emergency and mitigate its impact.

What is your view about the impact of climate change on County Sligo?

View	Percentage
Very unconcerned	4%
Unconcerned	12%
Very Concerned	27%
Concerned	58%
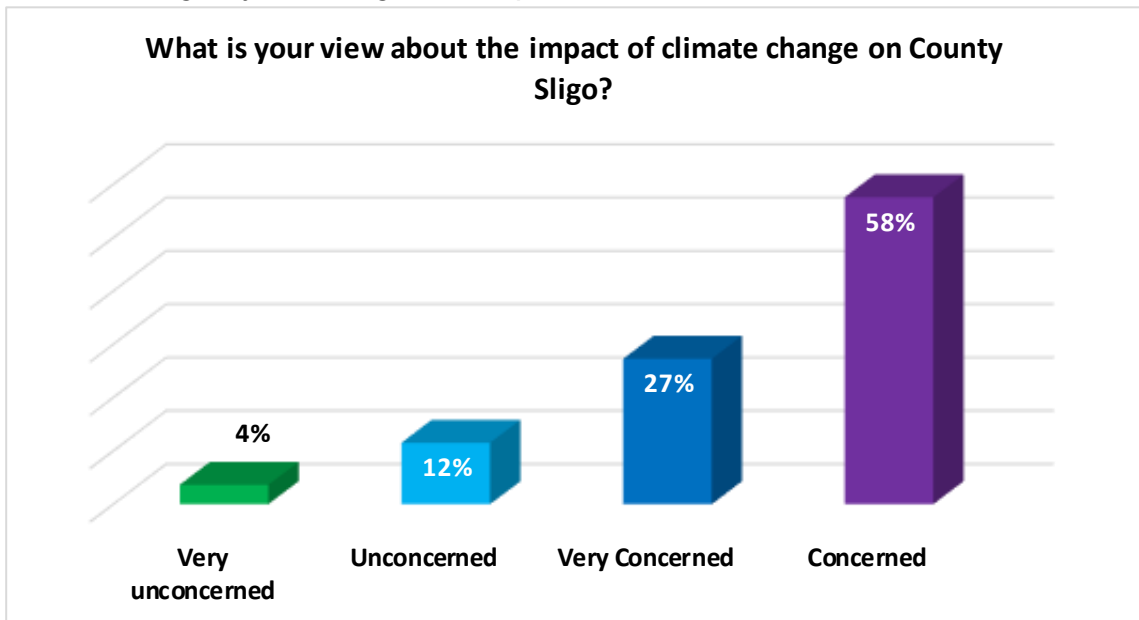
Figure 4-5: Views About the Impact of Climate Change on County Sligo

As already mentioned, sustainable and active mobility, particularly around cycleways and greenways as well as increased public transport, were some of the many measures identified which can contribute to a more sustainable Sligo. Other areas highlighted included better recycling facilities, decarbonisation zones, initiatives to protect Sligo's biodiversity, more initiatives to reduce plastic use and increased use of green or alternative energy sources. In relation to more sustainable energy sources the potential for the development of the bioenergy sector in Sligo was highlighted along with the opportunity for the county to become a national demonstrator of biomethane production by anaerobic digestion. Although seen as a more long-term opportunity, the potential for Sligo to benefit from the development of offshore wind energy in the North West was also highlighted. However, it should be noted that it was emphasised by a number of key stakeholders that Sligo needed to carefully assess what was possible and potentially act as a testbed and service centre for offshore projects.

Smart Technologies - Top 3 Frequencies

Smart Traffic Lights to reduce traffic congestion	27%
Energy Efficient Buildings	21%
Smart Waste Management	15%
Smart Parking to alert road users where spaces are available	13%
Smart public transport	12%
Air Quality Monitoring	5%
Water Quality Monitoring	5%
Other (please state below in Question 35)	1%
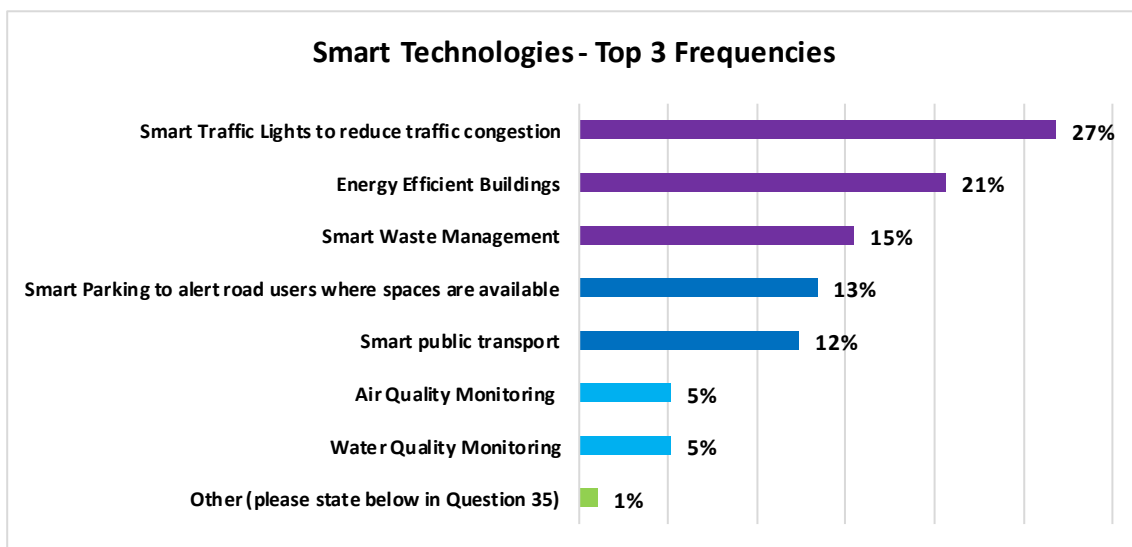
Figure 4-6: Smart Technologies

There was a general need identified to raise more awareness of the effect climate change will have on Sligo and the initiatives and measures that both the community and private sector can implement or join. Similarly, it was clear that there is a need to raise awareness of the supports available to help businesses go green, with only 50% of businesses that responded to the survey indicating that they were aware of such supports. Finally, in relation to smart technology, the top 3 technologies identified as being beneficial to Sligo in the survey by both the private sector and the wider community can all have a role in addressing the effects of climate change. These were smart traffic lights to help reduce congestion, energy efficient buildings and smart waste management.

4.5   Community

Ensuring an inclusive and healthy community that caters for all groups regardless of whether they are in an urban or rural setting was identified as being central to the

ambition for Sligo in 2030. This included an age friendly Sligo that caters for its elderly population, a Sligo that supports those with disabilities, a Sligo that supports those from minority groups and a Sligo that supports its families and young people.

Sligo's people and its strong community were highlighted as some of Sligo's key assets and strengths. It was felt that there was a strong culture of volunteerism which was to the benefit of the entire community. As such the many volunteer and community groups should continue to be supported and developed. Similarly, the fantastic work done by various cultural, social and sports clubs was also identified, with the important role that sport can play in promoting the health of the community highlighted. It was also acknowledged that areas of deprivation continue to be present across the county and that work should continue to address and reduce poverty and improve outcomes in disadvantaged areas.

On services, the need for more quality childcare at affordable prices was highlighted as a key issue that needs addressed. Other key supports suggested for families included more parent/carer and toddler groups and an increase in the provision of play areas across Sligo Town and County. In relation to young people, the need for more free or affordable recreational activities and access to appropriate supports and services in relation to mental health were also highlighted. More generally on health there was a suggestion around a need for greater acute healthcare facilities, cancer services and mental health supports. In relation to asylum seekers there was a specific need raised for the development of an integration plan, similar to those developed in other counties.
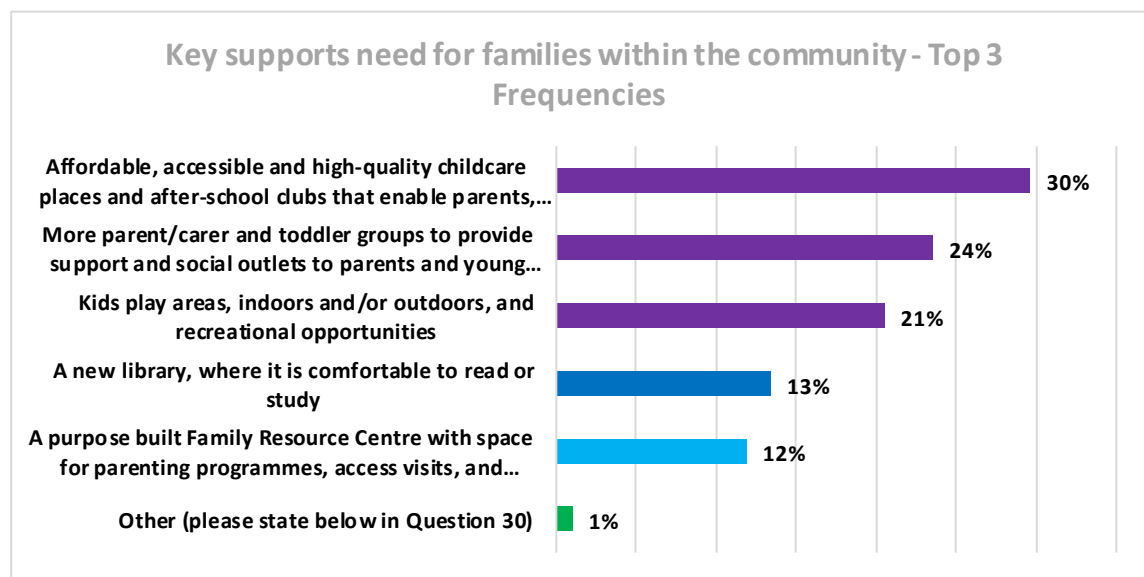
Figure 4-7: Key Supports Needed for Families within the Community

Numerous other initiatives and measures were submitted for consideration in relation to supporting the community which ranged from improving the public realm and increasing amenities, to education initiatives and expanding support services. This included the development of community hubs, the development of a family resource

centre and a dedicated women's health centre. The need for continuous upskilling, the development of digital and ICT skills, and preparing the community for jobs of the future were also all highlighted as important areas to address as Sligo moves towards 2030 and ties in well with the smart Sligo ambition. In relation to the public realm, issues highlighted included the need for a covered civic space for people to meet, improved street furniture and more public toilets.

It should also be noted that there were a number of cross cutting themes and issues identified as being of benefit to the community that have already been covered in the sections above. This included the need for housing, the need for better employment opportunities, and the need for improved public transport. In relation to health, the promotion of active mobility was also seen as key with submissions for expanded and safer greenways, walkways, and cycle paths across the county. The benefits of smart technology were also mentioned in relation to the health of the community, with the likes of retrofitting and electric transport being highlighted as potential contributors to improved health outcomes. An idea around the potential for smart technology to be used in relation to the measurement of radon gas in homes was also highlighted.

Chapter Five

5

SCOT ANALYSIS

5 SCOT Analysis

This section identifies key Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities and Threats relevant to the development of Sligo over the next 8 – 10 years. It has been supplemented through feedback and comments received from the stakeholder and public consultation process conducted as part of the development of the new Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision plan.

Table 5-1: SCOT Analysis

Strengths	Constraints	Opportunities	Threats
Economy and Employment	**Economy and Employment**	**Economy and Employment**	**Economy and Employment**
• Designated Regional Growth Centre with access via road, rail, and air.	• Employment /Career opportunities	• New integrated whole county approach to promote and develop Sligo under the Sligo.ie campaign	• Automation of work and skills could lead to job losses
• Strong indigenous business community and good business collaboration	• Brain-drain with large numbers of young people leaving Sligo due to lack of employment opportunities	• Further develop the tourism sector and promote Sligo as a premier destination by capitalising on unique strengths such as Yeats, and the natural environment	• Brexit and COVID-19 continue to pose a threat to trade and tourism
• Solid manufacturing and professional services sector with a growing tech presence.	• Low employment growth in comparison to neighbouring counties.		• A lack of a coordinated approach on tourism, culture, heritage and the arts.
• Strong Pharma and Med tech sectors with existing clusters	•In general Sligo's Tourism potential is not being realised and more work is necessary to identify underperforming areas and measure performance.	• Potential to become a leading example for the use of smart technology, and developing partnerships	• NWRA is now a Region in Transition
• Good agribusiness/agri-tech sector			•Rural depopulation and decline and the increasing challenge that this poses to rural towns, villages and communities.
• Attractive FDI location with 26 IDA supported companies in 2019	• Moderate scoring on the European Innovation scorecard[51]	• Opportunity to build on a new project utilising smart technology on the Eurovelo Route 1 cycle	• Lack of gas network infrastructure might be a deterrent to FDI
• Strong tourism offering	• Insufficient numbers of local SMEs and micro businesses exporting or looking to internationalise	• Capitalise on Sligo's lower cost base for doing business	• Failure to address commercial vacant property rate could lead to further economic decline
• Relatively low unemployment rate			
• Relatively low cost of doing business	• Sligo is seen as a short stay destination instead of a holiday destination	• Attract further FDI and nurture start-ups and spin-offs from current operations to increase employment opportunities	• Failure to adequately embrace technological change could lead to a decrease in competitiveness and
• Strong Team in Sligo's Business Improvement District			

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[51] "The European innovation scoreboard provides a comparative analysis of innovation performance in EU countries, other European countries, and regional neighbours. It assesses the relative strengths and weaknesses of national innovation systems and helps countries identify areas they need to address" See: European innovation scoreboard | Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (europa.eu)

Strengths	Constraints	Opportunities	Threats
and good public realm strategy •Good business supports **Community and Quality of life** • The community and its people • Good network around the elderly and good community collaboration • House prices 40% less than national average and Childcare costs 30% less than Dublin • Average commute times one of the lowest in Ireland • Relatively low cost of living • Good quality of life in Sligo with the ability to have a good work /life balance • Sligo is a compact county meaning you can get things done quickly • Sligo has a strong volunteering community with fantastic work done by community groups, sports, cultural and social clubs. • Strong sporting culture including Sligo Rovers FC • In relation to public safety, Sligo Town has a good CCTV network and low crime rate • Sligo has a great commitment to becoming healthy	• Lack of awareness of supports available to businesses • Lack of acknowledgement of the value of small indigenous businesses and SMEs. • Lack of understanding of the value of a vibrant retail and hospitality sector •Availability of workforce in certain sectors **Housing** • Lack of housing availability and supply • Quality of housing available • Sligo does not have a strong pipeline for High Potential Start Ups • Planning permission viewed as difficult to obtain **Community and Quality of life** • Although County Sligo remains marginally below average nationally in relation to deprivation, the levels of deprivation have increased in recent years[52] • Childcare facilities are nearing capacity • Rural isolation in Sligo is an issue for the elderly population • Lack of children's play areas in comparison to other places • Lack of free	• Develop and promote coach and conference tourism • Tap into potential 1,400 jobs proposed by the Ireland West Airport SDZ • The Gaming proposition for Strandhill • Manufacturing Futures Centre proposed for Market Yard in Sligo Town • Develop start-up programmes with MNC's to enhance the development of indigenous companies • To organise more business-related events to build interrelationships between companies • To invest in R&D, and provide associated facilities to attract more industry **Community and Quality of life** • Capitalise on Sligo's rich cultural and natural heritage, lower house prices, education, and employment opportunities to attract and retain qualified professionals and families • Celebrate Sligo's diversity across age, ethnicity, and backgrounds • To expand health services in relation to mental health, acute health facilities and cancer services	losing out on FDI • Failure to address brain-drain resulting in a skills gap between industry and the workforce • Shift to hybrid retail and changing consumer behaviour may leave more retail units vacant • There is a low participation in lifelong learning that could impact job creation • Failure to secure buy-in from key-stakeholders, both public and private for the Sligo 2030 plan • Failure to map ICT infrastructure such as ducting could lead to loss of revenue for the Council **Housing** • Failure to address housing issues will result in barriers to investment and meeting population targets and inadequate provision for the existing community • Shortage of developers in Sligo could impact housing supply **Community and Quality of Life** • Failure to address rising levels of deprivation and poverty could lead to disadvantage in areas of health, education and employment • Failure to integrate

[52] For full details see Section 3.7.1

Strengths	Constraints	Opportunities	Threats
Culture and Heritage • Natural environment – Sligo has outstanding natural beauty • Sligo's Neolithic Landscape that is seeking UNESCO World Heritage Status • Over 5,000 recorded archaeological sites • Significant public realm and cultural projects funded in Sligo Town • Rich natural and cultural heritage sitting on the Wild Atlantic Way, 200km of walking trails, a vibrant creative sector, Yeats country and archaeological sites and monuments of national and international importance • Strandhill has an Eden Award recognising it for excellence in sustainable tourism • Sligo Town holds a purple flag award for excellence in the night life of a Town • Sligo food trail **Infrastructure and Accessibility** • Major infrastructure projects such as Western Distributor Road completed in Sligo Town, N4, N15/16, and the new Garvogue Bridge • Growing internet connectivity across the county with large decreases in households without	recreational areas where people young and old can meet up • Lack of public toilets • Access around towns for people with disabilities could still be improved **Culture and Heritage** • Lack of indoor activities for adults and children •Could be more lectures and public talks on big societal issues • No Museum **Infrastructure and Accessibility** • Peripheral location in the Northwest with lack of regional connectivity • Limited rail connectivity • Absence of motorway to Dublin and road network to Belfast and Galway mostly sub-standard • Traffic congestion in Sligo Town • Lack of public transport especially in rural areas • Need for more serviced enterprise parks near Sligo Town • Fibre broadband blackspots and rural areas with poor mobile coverage • Absence of local gas network infrastructure • Lack of identification and measurement of ICT infrastructure across the county	**Culture and Heritage** • Develop a museum **Infrastructure and Accessibility** • Develop Sligo port/docklands for recreation and office use • Repurpose vacant or derelict buildings as innovation centres, venues for the arts and recreational spaces • Promote Ireland West Airport as the best connection to Sligo County and the wider region • Remote working / digital hubs, particularly in rural areas • Fit for purpose town centre **Education and Training** • New Technological University status for IT Sligo and St Angela's College. • Creation of an educational quarter / centre in Sligo Town • Promotion of MSLETB training for further education and upskilling of SME's and businesses • Open up St Angela's Campus to community events **Environment and Sustainability** • Potential to become a leading Green county in Ireland as well as a leader in sustainable tourism and other areas	Sligo's diverse population could lead to increased discrimination and isolation • Failure to explore options for the development of childcare facilities could leave Sligo with a shortage of childcare services • Failure to promote healthy lifestyles and positive mental wellbeing could lead to higher levels of addiction and Illness. • High radon areas in Sligo could pose a threat to health if appropriate measures aren't taken by households **Culture and Heritage** • Failure to protect Sligo's special areas of conservation and natural heritage could lead to further decline e.g. Knocknarea and Queen Maeve's cairn. • Lack of Conservation Plans in place by relevant responsible agencies for the protection and management of the key Heritage Sites in Sligo. **Environment and Sustainability** • Climate change will have a significant impact on the people of Sligo, its natural landscape and environment, agriculture and businesses including

Strengths	Constraints	Opportunities	Threats
internet access	**Commercial Vacancy**	• Greening Sligo Town through implementation of the new public realm plan, creating more climate friendly environment	those in the SME sector.
• Accessible via road, rail and air	• High commercial vacancy rate which is also having a negative impact on town centre	• Increasing the local production, supply and use of green sources of energy	• Failure to address the biodiversity crisis could see further decline in native species and ecosystems such as forests and peatland which could threaten future generations livelihoods and health
• Sligo has large amounts of land banks suitable for development	• Majority of vacant units are not fit for purpose	• Develop offshore renewable energy infrastructure to meet future demand	• Not enough electric vehicle charging points currently to meet 2030 Climate Action target
• Strong wastewater treatment facilities – can service a population of 80,000	• Lack of data on property ownership inhibits ability to bring vacant units back into use	• Potential to become a services centre for offshore wind projects	• Failure to provide sufficient public transport could result in further isolation and impact the ability to meet emission reduction targets
• Local authorities are stakeholders in Ireland West Airport and as such there is good collaboration	**Environment and Sustainability**	• Provide electrified public transport	• Failure to provide necessary infrastructure for cycling could impact safety and up-take
Education	• Environmental impact of high rate of car use for travelling to work and education	• Build on circular economy initiatives already underway	
• Excellent educational infrastructure with opportunities for life-long learning, employee education and upskilling of the workforce, and well-developed innovation & research resources	• The roads connecting Sligo, particularly the road going to St Angela's College, does not facilitate safe walking or cycling	• To develop cutting edge pilots: for instance, in hydrogen, smart neighbourhoods (decarbonization zones), sustainable transport management, data management.	
• Strong educational attainment	• Lack of awareness of supports available to businesses go green and how businesses can join green initiatives	• Potential for the development of the bioenergy sector in Sligo	
• New Sligo Town Campus and Cultural and Learning Hub	• Lack of public recycling bins		
• The County has a large education catchment area	•Poor cycling infrastructure		
Strategy and Planning	**Strategy and Planning**		
• Good collaboration between certain stakeholders but more collaboration needed	• Resourcing constraints in Local Authority		
	•Lack of coordination in selling Sligo and measuring outcomes of various promotions to attract both visitors and businesses		

Chapter Six

6

NEEDS ANALYSIS

6   Needs Analysis

The Needs Analysis which appears below is the culmination of the policy context, the socio-economic analysis completed to date and outlined in the Socio-Economic Profile, and SCOT Analysis sections of this document. This analysis has been further supplemented and validated through feedback from the consultation process which has included written submissions, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and online surveys. The summary of key needs identified in this report are outlined below:

- **Housing – addressing the provision of housing and the lack of available private residential developments in Sligo to meet current and future demands.** This is a vital issue not only in relation to providing adequate provision for Sligo's current community but also in relation to contributing to achieving Sligo's population targets and the ability of the County to attract investment and increase employment. This will also need to include specialist housing provision for older people, people with disabilities, homeless individuals, individuals from the travelling community, international protection applicants and students. To meet population and growth targets as set out in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, Sligo will need to increase the annual supply of new housing by over 236%. As such innovative solutions are needed to ensure that Sligo achieves it growth ambitions.

- **Economy – growing the employment base and creating more job opportunities.** If Sligo is to meet its growth and population targets, then a significant increase in job creation and employment needs to be planned for and delivered. This includes attracting new investment, supporting existing businesses including those in the retail, hospitality and tourism sectors, fostering entrepreneurship, ensuring the community has the necessary skills to meet current and future employers' needs, ensuring the necessary infrastructure including office space and the adequate provision of high-speed broadband across the county. This will also need to include specific support for rural towns and villages across the county to address rural decline.

- **Transport – increasing mobility and accessibility to and from Sligo.** Increasing mobility and accessibility to and from Sligo is a key area to address in relation to supporting Sligo's communities and addressing isolation, supporting the private sector and enhancing the County's ability to attract visitors that will support the tourism sector. This will include continued improvements and upgrades to key road networks, raising awareness and enhancing connections with Ireland West Airport, examining potential enhancements to the rail network, and increasing and upgrading infrastructure around active and sustainable mobility such as segregated cycle paths, cycleways and greenways.

- **Revitalising Sligo's Town Centres – regeneration of town centres, improving the public realm and addressing the commercial vacancy rate.** The commercial vacancy

rate across Sligo has been identified[53] as having the potential to contribute to the economic decline of the County. As such identifying solutions to issues of vacancy and dereliction is key to regenerating Sligo's town centres as well as helping to address the issue of rural decline. Connected to this are initiatives related to improving the public realm to ensure Sligo's towns and villages are accessible, functional, and vibrant places that cater for all the community, foster a strong sense of place and increase their populations.

- **Climate Change – focusing, preparing, and acting on the challenges of climate change**. Climate Change will have a significant impact in Sligo and will affect the County's communities, the natural environment and the private sector including SMEs. With ambitious targets being set at national and EU level in relation to emissions and climate change, Sligo has work to do if it is to become an exemplar county in relation to climate action. This includes encouraging and shifting to more sustainable modes of transport, increasing the use of alternative and renewable sources of energy, reducing energy consumption in the private sector and the community, increased recycling, and the protection and rewilding of Sligo's native ecosystems and habitats.

- **Community – ensuring inclusion and adequate services.** The community in Sligo is one of the County's key strengths. The needs of the community are broad and wide-ranging and interconnected with many of the other topics identified above. This includes, but is not limited to, the need for access to housing, employment, education and training, supports for families, children and young people, and healthcare. It is important that in the provision of these services, equality of opportunity and access is provided regardless of background, ethnicity, age, gender or disability. In doing so, this should also contribute to the reduction of poverty and deprivation across the County. Furthermore, it is important to note the role that community groups, social enterprises, and volunteer groups fulfil in providing vital services and supports across the county. As such, there is also a need to ensure that these groups are recognised, supported and further developed to ensure they continue their important role in delivering for their communities.

- **Smart Sligo – defining and measuring Sligo as a smart region.** Sligo is seeking to position itself as a smart region and as a leader in the North West region in the utilisation of smart technology. However, for this to be a success, Sligo needs to define and agree exactly what being smart is going to mean for the county and what indicators it will use to measure its success. This could include concepts around a Smart Environment (using technology to become more sustainable), Smart Economy (creating an innovative economy perhaps through greater Research and Development), Smart Living (for example e-health and smart metering at home), Smart Government (for example innovative engagement with the community and e-services) , Smart Mobility (increased active and sustainable mobility) and Smart People (increased digital literacy and improved education outcomes across groups).

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[53] See: Northern & Western Regional Assembly, A Region in Transition - The Way Forward, 2020.

In relation to measuring success, smart indicators could be developed around specific areas such as connectivity, mobility, jobs, housing, health, education, government, and utilities.

While these 7 topics were identified as key needs from the analysis and consultations held to date, a consistent and highly important theme highlighted throughout the consultation was the need for more joint-up thinking, coordination, collaboration and communication across Sligo County Council, government agencies, education providers, the private sector, and the wider community, to ensure that Sligo achieves its goals and objectives over the next 8 – 10 years. As such, when assessing the needs below, thought should be given to how they will be addressed through partnership and collaboration and how progress will be communicated to the wider community.

6.1 Housing

While housing is a national issue that may require national intervention to address some of the causes of low supply such as the cost of building and the lack of finance; it has also been identified as a key need for Sligo to address moving forward. This is a crosscutting need required to service the existing community in Sligo, to enable the growth of the population and to attract new investment. It has also been highlighted as a key constraint and concern during the consultation process by government agencies, the private sector, and the wider community. As such, it is connected to a number of the current high-level goals, including Goal 1 related to Sligo becoming a Key Regional Growth Centre and Goal 4 relating to healthy, vibrant, and inclusive communities, and to a lesser extent Goal 2 relating to smart technology and Goal 3 relating to climate action and sustainability. The Housing for All strategy recently published by the Government provides further impetus to take action on this issue and requires the development of Housing Delivery Action Plans by Local Authorities.

As noted in the Socio-Economic Profile section, the County Development Plan and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020 – 2032, have targeted a population of 74,000 - 75,500 for Sligo by 2031, with the Town growing to a population of 25,800. Connected to this population rise is a target of growing jobs to 17,000 in Sligo Town by 2040.

As highlighted in the Socio-Economic Profile, there is also significant demand for social housing in Sligo with such housing making up 10.3% of all housing in the County. Coupled with this, Sligo has experienced a more than 300% increase in households availing of the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme between 2016 - 2019. Therefore, the approach to housing must be inclusive and take into consideration the needs of the wider community.

However, over the course of 2017 - 2019, the annual average number of new houses coming into supply in Sligo was 139, amounting to a total of 418 new houses in that 3-year period.[54] Looked at regionally, Sligo ranked second from bottom in the North Western Region from 2017 - 2019, and behind similarly sized (by population) and in some cases smaller counties such as Monaghan, Cavan and Roscommon.

New Housing Supplied (Annual Average)
2017 - 2019

Donegal: 411, Mayo: 338, Monaghan: 185, Cavan: 148, Roscommon: 141, Sligo: 139, Leitrim: 61
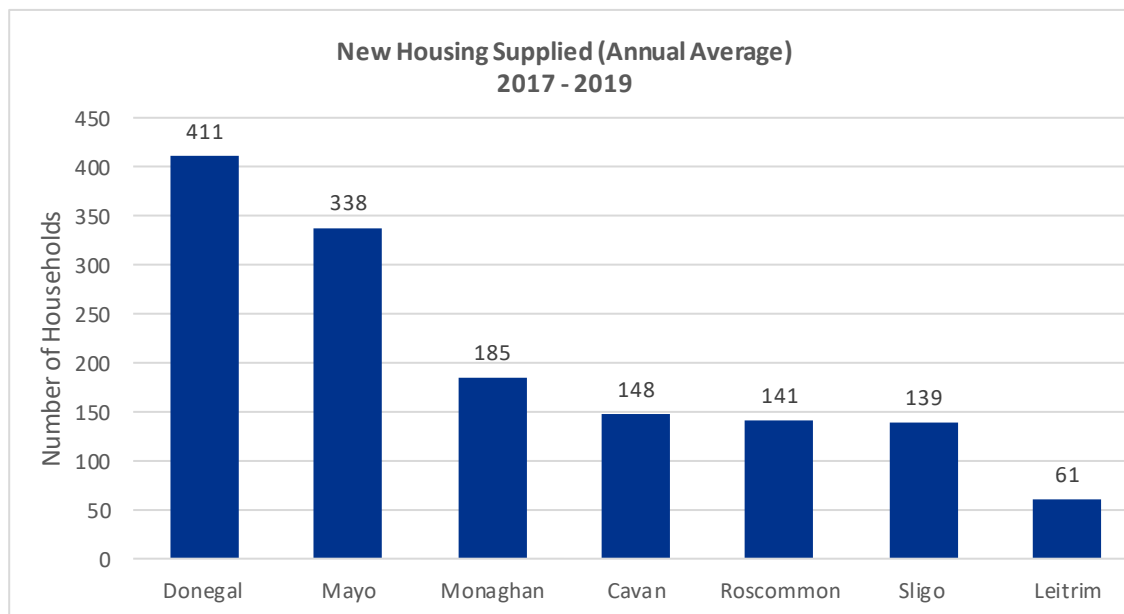
Figure 6-1: New Housing Supplied by County[55]

Housing demand and supply targets published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in 2020, have indicated that to meet the targets as set out in the Spatial and Economic Strategy, Sligo will need to increase the annual average number of new housing coming into supply from 139 to 468 units - an increase of over 236%.[56]

It is important to note that these houses, as they come into supply, will need to cater for a mix of different needs in an inclusive manner, including specialist housing provision (older people, people with disabilities, homeless individuals, individuals from the travelling community, international protection applicants and students). Furthermore, keeping in line with the sustainable and green underpinning principles of the Sligo 2030 plan, these houses will have to be energy efficient, ideally close to amenities and located in areas accessible by sustainable methods of transport. While the challenge is large, housing is an issue that needs to be addressed now to mitigate the impact in the future and allow Sligo to both provide for its community and realise its growth ambitions.

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[54] Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Structural Housing Demand in Ireland and Housing Supply Targets, 2020. Available from: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6d48f-ministerial-letter-to-local-authorities-structural-housing-demand-in-ireland-and-housing-supply-targets/

[55] See: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6d48f-ministerial-letter-to-local-authorities-structural-housing-demand-in-ireland-and-housing-supply-targets/

[56] See: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6d48f-ministerial-letter-to-local-authorities-structural-housing-demand-in-ireland-and-housing-supply-targets/

6.2   Economy

The fact that the Northern and Western Region has experienced a decline in economic prosperity and wealth generation over the last decade to now become what is classed in EU terms as a Region in Transition is a huge challenge for the region and for Sligo. As such, Growing the employment base has been identified as a key area to address in the Sligo 2030 plan. Increasing employment opportunities was also highlighted as a key issue by the community in the consultation process and as a key constraint in relation to the future development and growth of Sligo Town and County. To grow the population, reduce the brain drain (as identified in the socio-economic profile) and drive economic activity in the region, Sligo needs to grow its employment base through a mixture of attracting new investment, developing its own indigenous companies and ensuring that the correct infrastructure and skills are in place to allow businesses to flourish. The impacts of COVID-19 and Brexit also need to be considered to ensure that businesses have the supports that they need and the County recovers from the impacts of both in a timely fashion. Furthermore, specific supports for rural areas will need to be explored to help address the effects of rural decline.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020 - 2032 has a target of increasing jobs to 17,000 in Sligo Town by 2040 with the 2016 Census recording 10,658 individuals at work in the town. The forthcoming North West Enterprise Jobs Plan will also set objectives and actions in relation to economic activity in the region and will be of importance as Sligo moves towards 2030. From the analysis in the socio-economic profile, it can be seen that the unemployment rate in the Border Region, of which Sligo is a part, has largely fallen since 2012, with low levels recorded in 2019 at an average of 4.2%, followed by a slight increase in 2020 reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, when Sligo is compared to its regional peers in relation to employment growth, we can see that it has performed poorly in comparison. From 2011-2016, Sligo employment grew by just 2.2% which was significantly below the national growth of 11% and the lowest of any county in the state.[57]

Furthermore, while Sligo has been comparatively successful in attracting FDI, with over 2,351 people employed with IDA client companies in 2020[58], it has seen less success with the development of indigenous internationally exporting companies. The table below provides current statistics on Enterprise Ireland supported companies and associated employment numbers in the Border Region. The table highlights that Sligo is underperforming in this area with substantially less jobs being supported by Enterprise Ireland clients than in similarly sized counties such as Cavan and Monaghan. As such, it is important that Sligo works to improve performance in this area and examines measures and supports that can enhance and promote an entrepreneurial culture and mitigate any risks associated with overreliance on FDI.

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[57] Western Development Commission, County Sligo's Labour Market, 2017, available from: https://westerndevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/WDC-Insights-County-Sligos-Labour-Market-Census-2016-Oct-17.pdf
[58] Figures provided by IDA.

Table 6-1: Employment in EI Client Companies, 2020[59]

	Population	EI Clients	Jobs
Cavan	76,176	81	6,045
Monaghan	61,386	107	5,548
Donegal	159,192	138	4,148
Sligo	65,535	74	1,992
Leitrim	32,044	23	585

More positively, the establishment of the Technological University for the West and North-West will both increase the talent and the research capability available in Sligo, which in collaboration with industry, will further enhance Sligo's ability to attract investment and ensure that local skills meet industry needs. Similarly, the Education Training Board's further education programmes, will also contribute to the continued upskilling of the population and through its retrofitting training centre[60] will provide training on Near Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB) skills to help prepare Sligo for a more sustainable future. Furthermore, St Angela's College can ensure that Sligo is well placed to provide a skilled workforce in relation to public service requirements, particularly in in relation to education and healthcare professionals. However, while these educational institutions can help to align local skills with industry demand, the ability to retain the skilled graduates and workforce that they produce will depend on the opportunities and careers that are available in Sligo. As such, this reinforces the key need to grow the employment base and the career opportunities available throughout the County. This might include exploring the feasibility to develop new sectors and new clusters in Sligo potentially in areas related to the green economy and industry 4.0.

The impact of COVID-19 and the ongoing uncertainty and effects of Brexit also mean that specific supports will be needed to assist an array of businesses, particularly those in vitally important sectors to the Sligo economy such as hospitality and retail. An enhanced and more coordinated tourism offering will also have a role to play in attracting investment and will further support the retail and hospitality sectors. Opportunities exist in relation to attracting more visitors to existing attractions, outdoor activities and around the potential for business and coach related tourism. As part of the northern area of the Wild Atlantic Way, Sligo County Council needs to work with the relevant agencies such as Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to continue to promote, market and develop the tourism infrastructure in the County. Similarly, Farming, a sector which will also be affected by Brexit, has a key role to play in the economy and Sligo should ensure that its farming community is aware of the supports available to help to them become more sustainable and efficient, such as the smart farming initiative.[61]

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[59] Figures provided by Enterprise Ireland.
[60] See: https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/16253-minister-harris-announces-four-new-retrofitting-centres-of-excellence/
[61] See: https://smartfarming.ie/

However, there needs to be a whole county approach to growing the employment base and developing an ecosystem that is both sustainable for the community and the environment, meets the needs of current and prospective businesses, and prepares Sligo for jobs of the future and the risks associated with job automation. This includes continued and enhanced collaboration with key stakeholders, the community, and the private sector, and ensuring that key infrastructure and services such as suitable office space, remote working hubs (where the demand exists), public transport, housing and access via road, rail, and air, are in place to allow Sligo to grow.

6.3   Transport – Mobility and Accessibility

The analysis completed to date has identified transport and accessibility as a key area to address. Along with housing availability and employment opportunities, accessibility (road, rail, air) and the provision of public transport was consistently highlighted as one of the key issues from both a business point of view and from the wider community during the consultation process. While it is serviced via road, rail and air (via Ireland West Airport), Sligo is in a peripheral location in the North-West of Ireland with no motorway connecting it to Dublin and limited links to other regional hubs such as Galway, Letterkenny and Belfast. As such Sligo needs to ensure continued investment in areas that improve its connectivity and accessibility so that it remains an attractive and competitive location to work, live, visit, and invest in. However, this should be done in an inclusive, smart, and sustainable manner and thus, addressing this issue is a cross cutting need that covers the majority of the current high-level goals.

Planned and on-going improvements and upgrades have been identified in the County Development Plan and RSES for the N-4 Sligo to Dublin, the N-17 Sligo to Galway, N-15 Sligo to Letterkenny, and the N-16 Sligo to Belfast. However, while the road networks remain key to ensuring that Sligo remains competitive and connected to other regional hubs, a shift from private car usage to more sustainable modes of transport is also required.

Sligo is a rural county with approximately 60% of the population living in rural areas with a high level of private car usage for individuals travelling to work and education. To address this issue Sligo needs to make provision for more cycleways, greenways, footpaths, and public transport to encourage more sustainable methods of transport and assist in preventing rural isolation. A key consideration should be the safety of the users of these options, with a number of submissions received from the public suggesting a need for segregated cycle lanes to improve both safety and up-take. Other key areas that need to be assessed are the efficient scheduling and enhanced provision of public transport (including exploring a spoke wheel approach), enhancing connections with Ireland West Airport and assessing the rail offering to the rest of the country.

6.4   Revitalising Sligo's Town Centres

The commercial vacancy rate in Sligo has been identified as a key issue that needs to be addressed and as a potential cause of economic decline in the NWRA's 2020 report - A Region in Transition. This is true not only for Sligo Town but the County itself. The Sligo Collaborative Town Centre Health Check completed in 2020, assessed the commercial vacancy rate in Sligo's historic town centre as 18.4%.[62] Tubbercurry was also identified as a town with a significant commercial vacancy rate in 2020. At County level, for the final quarter of 2020 the GeoDirectory assessed the vacancy rate at 19.9% for the county. While this issue is not unique to Sligo and caution should be used in the language used to describe the extent of the problem, the vacancy rate has been at high levels in comparison to neighbouring counties for a number of years and continues to be significantly above the state average of 13.5%.[63]

As such there is a need to revitalise Sligo's town centres and address vacancy and dereliction where it exists. Addressing the commercial vacancy rate will be a challenge and known issues with bringing such buildings back into use include identifying ownership, inheritance issues, joint ownership, legal problems, lack of finance, costs involved, lack of motivation and lack of a coordinated approach.[64] Initiatives and suggestions identified in both the consultation and in research of national and international practice include, establishing a knowledge database[65] for town centres with standardised approaches to measuring vacancy,[66] taxes or other financial disincentives for vacant property owners,[67] and compulsory sale orders.[68] There is also the SARURE Interreg Europe project of which Sligo is a part, that aims to support rural retailers and reduce commercial vacancy through a number of policy interventions.[69]

Many of the vacant buildings may need to be repurposed with suggestions from the consultation including residential units, assisted living spaces for the elderly and those with disabilities, professional office space, remote working hubs and creative/performance spaces for the community. However, as highlighted in the consultation process, it will be important to conduct an assessment of town assets and related needs, before pursing specific projects.

The other consideration in revitalising the towns is in relation to improvements to amenities and the public realm. The Sligo Town Public Realm Action Plan (2018)

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[62] See: https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Sligo-Collaborative-Town-Centre-Health-Check.pdf

[63] See GeoDirectory, Commercial Property Report Q4 2020: https://www.geodirectory.ie/getattachment/Knowledge-Centre/Reports-Blogs/GeoView-Commercial-Property-Report-Q4-2020/GeoDirectory-GeoView-Commercial-Issue-20.pdf?lang=en-IE

[64] Department of Rural and Community Development, The Town Centre Living Initiative, 2020; available from: https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/77498/3b9f04d1-987f-4ed9-ac4c-750162e3f2a6.pdf#page=null

[65] Database could include information on vacancy and dereliction (as well as the reasons behind it), land use, demographics, education and employment, movement patterns and more.

[66] DRCD, The Town Centre Living Initiative, 2020

[67] DRCD, The Town Centre Living Initiative, 2020

[68] Scottish Land Commission, Transforming Scotland's Approach to Vacant and Derelict Landy, 2020.

[69] See: https://www.sligococo.ie/sarure/

describes a range of ways in which this can be achieved with detail on paving, vegetation, lighting, public art, street furniture, and smart technology. This aligns with many of the suggestions received during the consultation process which included improvements to amenities such as recreational public meeting spaces, increased benches and upgrades to ensure that towns are inclusive and accessible for all of the community including those with disabilities.

6.5   Climate Change

The need for Sligo to focus, prepare and act in relation to the challenges it faces from climate change is one of the key needs that has been identified from this process and a recurring theme during the consultation process. A coastal county with a beautiful natural landscape; sustainability and climate action (a green and sustainable Sligo) have already been identified as key underpinning principles of the new Sligo 2030 One Voice, One Vision strategic framework. Ireland's Climate Action plan (2019), the European Green Deal and Ireland's upcoming Climate Action Bill have set ambitious targets that Ireland will need to meet, including a 51% reduction in 2018-level carbon emissions by 2030, being climate neutral by 2050 and increased use of electric vehicles and renewable sources of energy.

As seen in the Socio-Economic Profile, work will be needed to help Sligo realise its ambition of becoming more sustainable and an exemplar in the region in relation to climate action. For example, in relation to transport, private car usage remains high in the County with 69% of people using a car to get to work and 58% of people using a car to get to education. Furthermore, the use of alternative transport (including cycling, walking, bus, minibus, coach, or train) at County level was generally low at 21% and has actually declined (23%) since the 2011 census. Sligo has also been identified as having a large catchment area with a substantial number of people travelling to work and education from counties Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, and Donegal. Therefore, a shift to more sustainable transport will have an important role to play in reducing Sligo's emissions.

As noted in the transport section of the Needs Analysis, Sligo will need to ensure the provision of more cycleways, greenways, footpaths and infrastructure such as segregated cycle lanes to help its society make this shift towards more sustainable modes of transport. Electric vehicles will also have a part to play, both through public transport and private use. As highlighted in the socio-economic profile, to meet Ireland's Climate Action plan target of 100% of new cars and vans being electrically powered by 2030, Sligo will need a substantial increase in the number of recharging points which currently stands at a total of 9 throughout the county. Remote Working hubs and the shift to hybrid working, aided by Sligo's digital transformation through its current Digital Strategy, may also have a role to play in reducing emissions in the county by reducing the amount of traffic on the road.

Increased use of alternative and renewable sources of energy will also be key. As identified in the socio-economic profile, Sligo currently has 48 wind turbines, with each turbine generating between 0.85 – 2.5MW of energy and has the potential to contribute further to help meet the demand required as part of targets in Ireland's Climate Action Plan and the European Green Deal. Other suggestions for areas to explore have included the development of a bioenergy sector in the County to help reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

The natural environment of the County was also identified as one of Sligo's key strengths and an asset that benefits the entire community. As such, Sligo must work specifically to protect its rich natural landscape and address the biodiversity crisis that it is facing. Initiatives that address the biodiversity crisis will also assist in the mitigation of the effects of climate change through the reduction of emissions by natural carbon sinks such as woodlands and bogs. Work in this area could include continuing and expanding initiatives that will assist in addressing biodiversity challenges such as the rewilding of areas, creation of new native woodlands and the protection and restoration of Sligo's native boglands. Furthermore, as a coastal county with a number of lakes and rivers, initiatives to protect life below water, as envisaged by Sustainable Development Goal 14, will also be important. This includes the protection of Sligo's water assets from risks associated with chemicals and plastics.

However, Sligo's approach to climate change needs to be over a much broader area of action. It will require a whole community approach, shifts in behaviour, awareness raising campaigns, business and community supports, waste reduction and increased recycling, training, and further investment to prepare Sligo for a more sustainable future. Work is already underway in relation to smart initiatives, climate adaptation through Sligo's Climate Adaption Strategy, decarbonisation zones and ongoing initiatives such as the All-Ireland Pollinator plan. Sligo needs to continue to build on current initiatives, infrastructure and where required, put in place the necessary regulatory environment, to ensure it achieves its targets and meets its ambition of being a leading green county in Ireland.

6.6   Community

Sligo's community and its people have been identified as one of its key strengths throughout the consultation and the analysis done to date. The Community's needs are crosscutting in nature and include many of the areas covered in the above sections. It includes the need for housing, the need for improved public transport, the reduction of poverty and the need for enhanced employment opportunities across all groups and in both urban and rural settings. However, given the diverse nature of Sligo (as outlined by in the table below which highlights the diverse and comprehensive groupings of community and voluntary activity under the three Public Participation Pillars), the needs are often much broader and, in some cases, more specific. As such, there is a need to ensure inclusion through the provision of adequate services across all groups both in urban areas and rural settings.

Table 6-2: Community and Volunteer Groups By PPN Pillar

Environment Pillar	Social Inclusion Pillar	Community & Voluntary Pillar
● An Taisce	● Active Retirement	● Sports Clubs
● Clean Coasts	● Disability Groups	● Family Resource Centres
● Birdwatch	● Faith/Religion based Groups	● Arts, Culture, Media, Heritage Groups
● Walking Matters	● Addictions and Recovery	● Community Centres
● Sligo Cycles	● Families and Parenting	● Residents Associations
● Tidy Towns	● Human and Civil Liberties	● Mental Health Groups
● Archaeology Groups	● Women's Groups	● Youth Groups
	● Men's Groups	● Education and Literacy Groups
	● Other Diversity Groupings	● Music, Performance and Drama Groups
	● Groups related to Refugees, Asylum Seekers and New communities	● Tourism, festivals & events groups
	● Carers	● Town and Village Development Groups
	● Some social Enterprises	● Volunteer Centre
	● Healthcare	● Covid Response Groups
		● Local Economic Development Groups

For instance, in relation to housing, Sligo must ensure that it makes adequate provision for the elderly, people with disabilities, asylum seekers, those from the travelling community and other minority groups. Each group and in some cases individuals, will have their own specific needs that will need to be addressed. Similarly, as mentioned in relation to revitalising the town centres, improvements will be needed to ensure that that they are accessible for those with disabilities as well as the elderly. This could include more street furniture for the elderly and ensuring footpaths and buildings are accessible to those with disabilities. An example of an improvement which was suggested during the consultation was the installation of a lift at Sligo Mac Diarmada station.

In relation to education and training in Sligo, initiatives need to be put in place that ensure participation and positive outcomes across groups. This includes supporting more women into education and training potentially through increased childcare provision, ensuring that people from disadvantaged areas and backgrounds are attaining positive educational outcomes, ensuring that all those that do want to progress to third level education can do so and that all those who wish to enter the jobs market have access to job focussed training such as apprenticeships should they wish to pursue them. In relation to employment, there must be similar initiatives to ensure that those from minority groups, people with disabilities and those from disadvantaged areas, as well as the long-term unemployed have the supports, should they need them, to assist in gaining employment. Such initiatives should also contribute to the reduction of poverty and deprivation which, as identified in the socio-economic profile, has increased in recent years.

In relation, to supports for families, children and young people, a range of needs were identified during the consultation process. This includes a clear need to expand the provision of childcare throughout the county, to increase the number of play areas for children throughout Sligo and to provide adequate mental health services for young people as well as adults. An initiative suggested during the consultation process was community hubs, based in urban and rural areas, that could provide access to key services related to family supports, youth services and space for cultural groups to meet.

There are also specific health needs across the community which have been highlighted both in the analysis and through the consultation. This includes supports around mental health, acute healthcare facilities, cancer services and continued supports for those affected by addiction. Sligo is also classified as a high radon gas area and as such households should be made aware of the health effects of radon gas and how they can check and reduce radon concentrations in their homes.

Finally, it is important to note the important role that community groups, social enterprises and sports clubs play in achieving social inclusion and reducing isolation through the delivery of key services throughout Sligo. As such there is a need to ensure that these groups are recognised, supported (both financially and through capacity building) and further developed to ensure they continue their important role in delivering for their communities.

6.7   Smart Sligo

Sligo is seeking to position itself as a leader in the North West region in the utilisation of smart technology by 2030. In doing so it seeks to become a smart county to the benefit of all its community. However, for this to be a success, Sligo needs to define and agree exactly what being smart is going to mean for the County and what indicators it will use to measure its success. There are existing ambitions to utilise technology to realise clean mobility, energy efficient neighbourhoods and to become a living lab to pilot technologies. However, as outlined below, being a smart county can have a much broader remit.

Sligo's Digital Strategy has put in place a strong base for achieving Sligo's smart region ambition. The Strategy's framework aligns well with smart county themes including increasing digital skills across the county, improving digital infrastructure (including through the continued roll-out of broadband), delivering digital services and community initiatives, and fostering innovation, enterprise, digital economy and employment. The strategy also outlines a governance model for the delivery of digital infrastructure that can help Sligo realise its smart ambitions. The proposed reference model will see local ownership of elements such as infrastructure, communication, and security, with the Council taking management responsibilities for services provided via subcontractors in relation to sensors, platforms, and applications. It also includes a number of

initiatives that fall under the smart category such as deploying smart parking initiatives, the continued roll-out of sensors to collect data to enable evidence-based decision making, measuring and monitoring energy usage throughout council properties using sensors, and expanding open data platforms and initiatives. In relation to this, as Sligo moves towards becoming an exemplar smart county, the County needs to conduct an audit of existing smart initiatives and improve how it highlights these initiatives to the wider public.

The All Ireland Smart Cities Forum identifies six themes for smart cities[70] which are in line with indicators developed by the European Smart Cities research group at the Centre of Regional Science of Vienna University of Technology.[71] These are a Smart Environment, a Smart Economy, Smart Living, Smart Government, Smart Mobility, and Smart People. The benefits of Smart Cities as identified by the forum include acting as a reference site to validate technology, moving from research to reality, building a collaborative framework to solve real world challenges, delivering more efficient city services, increased engagement with citizens and service users and more generally, enhancing the quality of life of all the community.[72] To build on the Digital Strategy, Sligo should explore adopting the thematic approach as outlined by the All Ireland Smart Cities Forum and define exactly what each smart area will cover for its communities. For example,[73] this could include:

- **A Smart Environment –** using technology to achieve more sustainable practices
- **A Smart Economy –** implementing smart initiatives and increasing R&D expenditure to create an innovative economy
- **Smart Living –** for instance increased roll-out of broadband and connectivity, increase use of smart metering at home, and the use of smart technologies for community purposes such as health and wellbeing.
- **Smart Government –** for example the expansion of e-services and increased engagement with the community.
- **Smart Mobility –** for example the expansion of cycleways, greenways, electric transport, public transport, smart traffic lights and smart parking.
- **Smart People –** for example increased digital literacy, increasing numbers attaining further education and a strong reflection of gender and diversity equality in educational and training opportunities.

Furthermore, the Council also needs to explore the data that will indicate its progress towards transitioning to a smart county. There are numerous indicators in use, but a simple framework suggested by the OECD could be adapted and refined to act as a base for Sligo moving forward. The current OECD framework suggests capturing data including:

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[70] See: https://smartcitiesireland.org/

[71] See: www.smart-cities.eu

[72] See: https://smartcitiesireland.org/about/

[73] See: www.smart-cities.eu & https://smartcitiesireland.org/

Table 6-3: OECD Smart Cities Measurement Framework

Area	Indicator
Connectivity	% households equipped with internet, wireless broadband coverage; % of households who use digital apps or platforms to connect to local community
Mobility	% of smart traffic lights; % of public transport equipped with real-time information;
Jobs and firms	% of job seekers who have access to e-career centres; expenditure in R&D
Housing and built environment	Open-source data; digital land-use and building permits
Health and safety	% of medical appointments conducted remotely; % of population registered with public alert systems for air and water quality;
Education and Skills	% of children who have access to e-learning platforms; number of computers, laptops, tablets, or other digital learning devices available per student at primary level
E-Government	% of city services available online
Energy, water and waste	% of households and buildings equipped with smart energy meters; % of buildings with smart electricity meters; % of smart streetlights; % drinking water under real-time water quality monitoring;

Source: OECD[74]

Other potential frameworks for smart cities and smart development that could be explored include the European Commission's 100 Intelligent Cities Challenge[75] and JASPERS guidelines on smart development.[76] Sligo can also draw on the experience of similar cities both nationally and internationally such as Dublin, Cork and Helsingborg in Sweden. As mentioned, any such framework would need to be adapted to become Sligo specific and potentially align with the thematic approach highlighted by the All Ireland Smart Cities Forum. In doing so, Sligo could define exactly what being smart will mean for the County, identify Sligo specific indicators and build on the Digital Strategy to advance Sligo's transition to a smart county.

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[74] See: https://www.oecd.org/cfe/cities/Smart-cities-measurement-framework-scoping.pdf
[75] See: Home | Intelligent Cities Challenge
[76] See: http://www.jaspers-europa-info.org/content/smart-development

Chapter Seven

7

REVISED VISION
AND GOALS

7 Revised Vision and Goals

Following on from the consultation and the analysis completed to date, the draft vision, and high-level goals as set out the in the draft Socio-Economic Statement have been reviewed and revised. The guiding principles and areas of ambition have also been revised and are provided below for reference. While the vision has been amended significantly to become more concise and focused, the draft goals will reflect more minor amendments reflecting the feedback received during the consultation and alignment with the identified key needs.

However, while the goals have seen minor amendments, the areas that need to be targeted for action have been clearly identified following analysis of the consultation findings and the completion of the full socio-economic profile. This includes key identified needs around housing, the economy and creating more job opportunities, transport, climate change, addressing commercial vacancy and revitalising town centres, community needs and Sligo as a smart county. In the next phase of the process to develop the new Sligo 2030 plan, this information will be used in the development of draft objectives and actions to achieve the Goals outlined below.

7.1 Guiding Principles and Areas of Ambition

The Sligo 2030 plan will assist in prioritising strategic investments in areas such as transport, housing, jobs, education, health, the environment, and energy. In line with the policy context and feedback received during the consultation, the plan will be underpinned **by the following guiding principles**:

- **A Smart and Innovative Sligo –** that drives sustainable economic growth, employment and development
- **A Green and Sustainable Sligo** – that proactively addresses climate change and protects its environment
- **An Equitable and Inclusive Sligo** – that enables and encourages public participation and supports its people
- **A Vibrant and Prosperous Sligo** – that strengthens its towns and villages and celebrates its culture, heritage and arts

These guiding principles underpin **four key areas of ambition**:

- Growing Sligo into its role as a **Regional Growth Centre** and **increasing employment across the County**
- Positioning Sligo on the forefront of **smart digital transformation**
- Positioning Sligo as an exemplar region in **climate action** in the context of the **Sustainable Development Goals**
- Improving the **living conditions and health** of the people in County Sligo and supporting its **vibrant communities**

Sligo County Council acknowledges that we are in a climate emergency and the significant and immediate impact that climate change will have on the County. As such, sustainability and climate action will be essential cross cutting themes that underpin the entire development of the Sligo 2030 plan across the economic, social, and environmental spheres.

These guiding principles have helped inform the development of a revised draft vision for County Sligo, outlined below.

7.2   Draft Vision

A revised draft vision is suggested below. It has been developed from the consideration of existing strategic documents, the principles and ambitions for County Sligo in the context of the Sligo 2030 plan and the feedback received during the consultation process. The revised draft vision has become more focused and concise, taking into account key elements identified from the consultation and the analysis done to date.

This includes Sligo's ambitions to be a leader of smart digital utilisation for the region, the overarching importance of sustainability and protecting the environment, Sligo's communities and culture which have been identified as key strengths, and the need for innovative and sustainable economic growth that supports job creation. It is hoped that this will be a shared vision that can be led and supported by the academic institutions and public sector agencies, local communities, the private sector including industry and business, and local government working in partnership to transform Sligo as it moves towards 2030. The revised draft vision is as follows:

> *Our Vision is for a **smart**, **sustainable**, and **socially inclusive** Sligo; one that cherishes its **vibrant communities**, protects and celebrates its **unique environment and rich culture**, and is a champion of **innovative growth and development**.*

The next section outlines the revised high-level goals to help activate this vision.

7.3   High-Level Goals

With the completion of the consultation process and the development of the full socio-economic profile the high-level goals have been reviewed and revised. The revised goals have seen minor amendments reflecting the feedback received and are aligned with the needs identified and the revised principles, ambitions and vision. An overview of the goals are as follows:

Table 7-1: High-Level Goals

Goal	Goal Description
Goal 1	Sligo will be a Key Regional Growth Centre that drives sustainable economic activity and employment throughout the region and increases the population across the County.
Goal 2	Sligo will become a smart county and a leader in the utilisation of smart technology through partnership with educational and commercial third parties.
Goal 3	Sligo will be a proactive county in the fight against climate change and a model of best practice in climate action with sustainability central to all areas of life
Goal 4	Sligo will be an inclusive, healthy, and equitable society that supports its vibrant communities
Goal 5	Sligo will celebrate its rich cultural heritage and realise its tourism potential
Goal 6	A collaborative and innovative Sligo

The goals have been designed to be transformative, ambitious, and importantly to align with existing policies including the RSES, NPF and relevant economic, community, digital and climate policies for County Sligo in a socially inclusive manner. The below outlines and defines each goal in more detail. It also suggests, at a high-level, areas that could be potentially addressed under each goal. However, these areas are for discussion purposes only and should not be confused with the specific objectives and actions which will be developed in the next phase of the development of the new Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision Strategic Framework.

Goal 1 – Sligo will be a Key Regional Growth Centre that drives sustainable economic activity and employment throughout the region and increases the population across the County.

Embracing Sligo's status as a regional growth centre in the Northwest, sustainable economic development in the region must be driven through an innovative and collaborative approach that ensures Sligo meets the skill and infrastructure requirements of existing and new businesses. This is aligned to the goal for an Enterprising Sligo, identified in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), which aims to support local businesses and national or global firms located in Sligo by fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, expanding education opportunities, and providing a skilled workforce to the industry. As such, Sligo must continue to attract new people and increase its population to provide this workforce and to ensure that it meets its population targets as set out in the RSES.

This could include:

• Addressing the housing crisis in Sligo through collaborative thinking and innovative solutions, exploring incentives to increase housing provision, repurposing vacant property for residential purposes and developing a Housing Delivery Action plan with clear targets on the number of houses to be supplied to Sligo each year.

• Addressing commercial vacancy issues through repurposing of vacant property for residential (as envisaged above) and recreational purposes where possible and in

other cases exploring incentives that may assist in bringing properties back into commercial use.

- Enabling the attraction of new investment and to build on the strengths of Sligo's innovative tech and med-tech clusters, by providing serviced enterprise sites at key locations in Sligo Town supported by enabling infrastructure (for example a future transit stop next to the proposed IDA Oakfield Business Park), supporting development of remote working hubs, seeking to develop new sectors and clusters that will lead to high end manufacturing and employment opportunities, and continuing to promote Sligo through the sligo.ie website.

- Investing in critical transport infrastructure to maximise the opportunities of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) e.g. investing in public transport and measures to encourage modal shift to non-car-based forms of transport, and enhancing or upgrading the N15 to Letterkenny and N17 to Galway, as well as the N4 to Dublin and the N16 to Dundalk and Belfast.

- Connecting and servicing rural communities to enable them to build on their existing strengths and assets as well as develop new opportunities. This includes minimising the 'digital divide', ensuring both broadband connectivity and the provision of skills training to promote digital literacy.

- Ensuring that rural towns, villages, communities, and businesses receive the necessary supports to prosper, grow and benefit from regional economic development. This could include programmes such as the SARURE project that aims to support rural retail and reduce commercial vacancy.[77]

- Seeking to ensure future graduates can choose to stay in the region and to take up high quality jobs created by existing and new enterprises by building on the success of achieving a Technological University for the North West (2022) in the area of education, training and skills development. For example, collaboration between the Third level colleges (the Technological University), the Training & Education Providers (e.g. ETB) and local industry to ensure that the workforce have the skills to meet future industry needs.

- Promoting an entrepreneurial culture that is supportive and encouraging of new start-ups, micro-businesses, and SMEs, with a view to creating and sustaining employment opportunities and increasing exports from local companies. Supporting innovative business practices to support Sligo's position to be at the forefront of smart digital utilisation and climate action innovation by addressing digital barriers.

Goal 2 – Sligo will become a smart county and a leader in the utilisation of smart technology through partnership with educational and commercial third parties.

Building on the initiatives already underway, embracing smart technology and accelerating the digital transformation can ensure that Sligo becomes a smart county through the use of technology and other smart initiatives. Living with Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of being connected, and of the benefits of online communication and business. The utilisation of smart technology is envisaged to be a

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[77] See: https://www.sligococo.ie/sarure/

cross-cutting benefit for all those who live and work in Sligo, but benefits need to be harnessed. Furthermore, a smart Sligo will not solely focus on technology but will explore other smart initiatives and concepts around areas such as mobility and transport, community wellbeing, and education and upskilling.

This could be achieved through:

- Defining exactly what a smart Sligo will mean for the County and how it will be measured and assessed. This could be assisted by exploring existing smart frameworks such as those developed by the OECD, the European Commission's 100 Intelligent Cities Challenge and JASPERS, and learning from other smart cities such as Dublin, Cork and Helsingborg.
- Establishing a smart programme for Sligo overseen by a smart steering group to ensure its successful implementation.
- Positioning Sligo as a smart place destination by applying a range of smart technologies to Sligo Town and County. For example, exploring the use of smart technology in farming, environmental monitoring, public transport, traffic management, parking management, waste management, and enhanced tourism applications (building on a new project utilising smart technology on the Eurovelo Route 1 cycle touring route from Norway to Portugal via Ireland, optimising route planning and maximising economic potential).
- Becoming a pilot county for new smart technologies and accelerating the deployment of smart infrastructure across our Town and County, for example by seeking funding for an early roll out of the 5G network, and deployment of smart sensors in street furniture.
- Partnering with relevant commercial and academic third parties (e.g. Sligo IT) to ensure Sligo is positioned as a leader in the adoption of smart technology.
- Striving for more inclusive use of technology by a wider range of demographics creating more connected communities while tackling rural isolation.
- Exploring other smart concepts in relation to community well-being, active mobility and upskilling and education.

Goal 3 – Sligo will be a proactive county in the fight against climate change and a model of best practice in climate action with sustainability central to all areas of life

Recognising our reality as a coastal county with a unique and diverse environmental landscape, Sligo must be protected for future generations from the threat of climate change. To do this sustainable development and climate action must be incorporated into all areas of life in the County. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will underpin Sligo 2030.

This could include:

- Engaging, planning, and adapting to ensure a more resilient and climate ready Sligo.
- Promoting and supporting greater community involvement and business participation in sustainable environmental initiatives. This could include promoting

awareness of and implementing policies supporting environmental sustainability and energy efficiency across all sectors and communities, including funding for those that may be disadvantaged by such policies.

- Encouraging and promoting projects/businesses that will contribute positively and grow the circular and bioeconomy to promote sustainable rural and urban economic development as part of the overall aim of transitioning to a low carbon economy.
- Greening Sligo Town through implementation of the new public realm plan, creating more climate friendly environments, for example through the planting of more trees and pollinator friendly planting.
- Encouraging compact urban growth using existing urban sites where possible and enabling sequential development adjoining existing residential development through enabling infrastructure such as upgrading water and wastewater infrastructure. The objective is to reduce the need for car-based commuting by developing more homes near employment opportunities.
- Promoting and exploring initiatives to help farms become more sustainable such as integrated farming and cropping systems that protect natural resources such as soil and water, coupled with the use of smart technology to make farms more efficient.
- Exploring the utilisation of smart technologies, as set out in Goal 2, to help realise ambitions such as clean mobility and energy efficient buildings, homes, and streets.
- Increasing the local production, supply and use of green sources of energy subject to relevant assessments.
- Upgrading and expanding existing cycleways, walkways, greenways and cycle paths to encourage uptake and reduce vehicular emissions.

Goal 4 – Sligo will be an inclusive, healthy, and equitable society that supports its vibrant communities

Sligo County Council will continue to work to ensure an inclusive society that meets the needs of all our citizens including in areas such as health, education, employment, childcare, services for the elderly, housing, and transport. Our vibrant communities must be strengthened and enhanced making them more liveable and attractive places. While this includes all communities in the County, a particular focus will be on enabling Sligo Town to realise its potential as a regional centre by upgrading the town centre environment and enabling the town centre to be a multifunctional vibrant place that can regenerate civic engagement, attract tourists and support adjoining businesses.

This could include:
- Upgrading and enhancing Sligo Town centre through targeted public realm interventions that create attractive, vibrant, and multi-functional public spaces that are friendly and safe for the young and old by implementing Sligo's Public Realm Plan.
- Encouraging modal shift to non-car-based transport options through provision of an expanded network of green corridors (cycleways and walking routes as envisaged in Goal 3) through the urban core of Sligo Town and linking Sligo Town to nearby villages and recreational hubs.

- Building on the initiatives and work already in place to ensure that Sligo and all its communities are inclusive and accessible to those with disabilities.
- Continuing work to reduce poverty and deprivation and ensure that all our people have access to the services and amenities they need including in areas related to healthcare, addiction services, childcare, family supports and education.
- Ensuring strong reflection of gender and diversity equality in educational and training opportunities.
- Developing initiatives to ensure inclusive, connected, and vibrant communities that are their own agents for change and proactively involved in the development of Sligo.
- Promoting healthy life choices, positive mental health and building on community well-being initiatives.
- Ensuring inclusivity of new communities in County Sligo and involving and celebrating the diversity of population.
- Continuing to develop initiatives to tackle rural isolation and exploring how technology can be utilised to assist the elderly to remain in their homes if they wish to do so.
- Using data driven evidence to predict and prepare for the future needs of the population of County Sligo, for example housing and health.

Goal 5 – Sligo will celebrate its rich cultural heritage and realise its tourism potential

Celebrating our rich cultural heritage and recognising the actions already under way, by enhancing supports to the areas of culture, heritage, and the arts, further developing our tourism offering and adopting a more coordinated whole County approach.

This could include:
- Building on the unique landscape and culture of County Sligo and reinforcing a sense of place, for example development of an attraction of scale such as a County Museum to showcase Sligo's heritage and act as a flagship attraction, and secondary attractions based on unique aspects and strengths that County Sligo possesses including outdoor activities, including the water-based resources of the County, archaeology and its history, culture and creativity.
- Continue to work with Sligo's Neolithic Landscape Group that is seeking UNESCO World Heritage Status for the Sligo Neolithic Passage Tombs and work to promote and conserve Sligo's more than 5,000 recorded archaeological sites.
- Continuing to promote Sligo as one of Ireland's premier tourism destinations on the Wild Atlantic Way based on the brand Sligo Sets Your Spirit Free, with associated best in class web presence for Sligo experiences, strong coordinated B2B and wholesale sales activities, and strong collaborative marketing campaigns that will see tourism benefiting the whole county.
- Enhancing industry capability and capacity through an annual skills development plan, visitor service plan, tourism awareness programmes, networking, training needs analysis and strong linkages with education providers.
- Raising awareness of the value of our culture, arts, and heritage amongst the public and encouraging public participation across the areas of culture, heritage, and the

arts, and developing initiatives to ensure access to participation regardless of background or needs.

Goal 6 – A collaborative and innovative Sligo

Acknowledging the work that has been done by key stakeholders (including by the public and local businesses) and agencies throughout communities in County Sligo and at regional, national, and international level, the Council will commit to working under a collaborative framework.

This could include:

- Working (on a regional and national level with the NWRA and National Government) to alleviate the infrastructural deficits (transport, broadband, port, air access etc) for the region, so as to improve accessibility, connectivity and mobility into and out of the region as well as seeking to address the investment inequalities that has led the region to now being a Region in Transition.
- Developing initiatives to ensure collaboration is at the heart of Sligo's development, by identifying areas for information sharing, joint planning, strategy coordination, and training.
- Exploring synergies between stakeholders to allow us to create innovative solutions for the benefit of the whole county, for example by continuing to work on the development of a central portal for socio-economic research and data collection.
- Building collaborative relationships with neighbouring and cross-border counties such as Leitrim, Mayo, Donegal, Roscommon and Fermanagh to approach and address issues in a regional manner.

Chapter Eight

8

CONCLUSION

8 Conclusion

Sligo is on the cusp of major change. By 2030 it is hoped that Sligo will be a County at the forefront of smart technology utilisation that helps to drive Sligo's commitment to climate action, sustainable economic growth, and social inclusion. Sligo also has smart county aspirations with ambitions to achieve energy efficient neighbourhoods and clean mobility. As such the new Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision strategic framework, will be developed to be a transformational plan that seeks to see Sligo achieve its ambitions and potential, protects it rich natural landscape, improves all aspects of the County and serves the entire community.

The completion of this document represents the next step towards the development of the new Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision strategic framework. In line with the statutory process for the development of Local Economic and Community plans, this document acts as the revised Socio-Economic Statement. It has provided a full and detailed socio-economic profile of Sligo Town and County, a summary of the consultation findings, and an overview of the policy context. This has allowed for the development of a thorough and expanded SCOT analysis which has identified the strengths, constraints, opportunities and threats relevant to Sligo. From the existing policy context, the detailed socio-economic profile, the consultation findings and the SCOT analysis, a number of key needs have been identified for Sligo as it moves towards 2030. The needs identified are as follows:

- **Housing** – addressing the provision of housing and the lack of available private residential developments in Sligo to meet current and future demands.
- **Economy** – growing the employment base and creating more job opportunities.
- **Transport** – increasing mobility and accessibility to and from Sligo.
- **Revitalising Sligo's Town Centres** – the regeneration of town centres, improving the public realm and addressing the commercial vacancy rate.
- **Climate Change** – focusing, preparing, and acting on the challenges of climate change.
- **Community** – ensuring inclusion and adequate services.
- **Smart Sligo** – defining and measuring Sligo as a smart county.

Finally, taking into account the completed analysis and the findings from the consultation process, the document has outlined a revised draft vision and high-level goals as well as revised guiding principles and areas of ambition for the Sligo 2030 plan. The information and findings from this document including the SCOT analysis and the key identified needs will now be used to further develop the new Sligo 2030 One Voice One Vision strategic framework. In particular, it will help to inform the development of specific objectives and actions to achieve the overarching vision for 2030.

The next stage in the development of the new Sligo 2030 plan will see further development and refinement through the drafting of objectives and actions that will be timebound and measurable. Once the vision, goals, objectives, and actions have been agreed, the process will proceed to the development of the final plan before the new Sligo One Voice One Vision strategic framework is adopted and implemented.

APPENDIX A

9

ONLINE SURVEY ANALYSIS

9   Appendix A – Online Survey Analysis

The online surveys were opened for submissions on June 15th with submissions closing on July 8th. Two online surveys were produced: a community-based survey and a business-based survey. Over 200 responses were received between the two online surveys over the course of their publication. The online surveys were part of a larger consultation strategy which also involved written submissions, public webinars, focus groups and stakeholder interviews.

9.1   Community Survey

The community survey garnered 171 responses over the course of the online submission window. These responses have been aggregated by question and are illustrated through charts below.

Principal Status

Category	Percentage
Employed (Full Time)	64%
Self Employed (Full Time)	8%
Employed (Part Time)	8%
Self Employed (Part Time)	5%
Student	4%
Retired	4%
Other	3%
Unemployed	2%
Engaged in home duties	1%
Unable to work due to permanent sickness/disability	1%
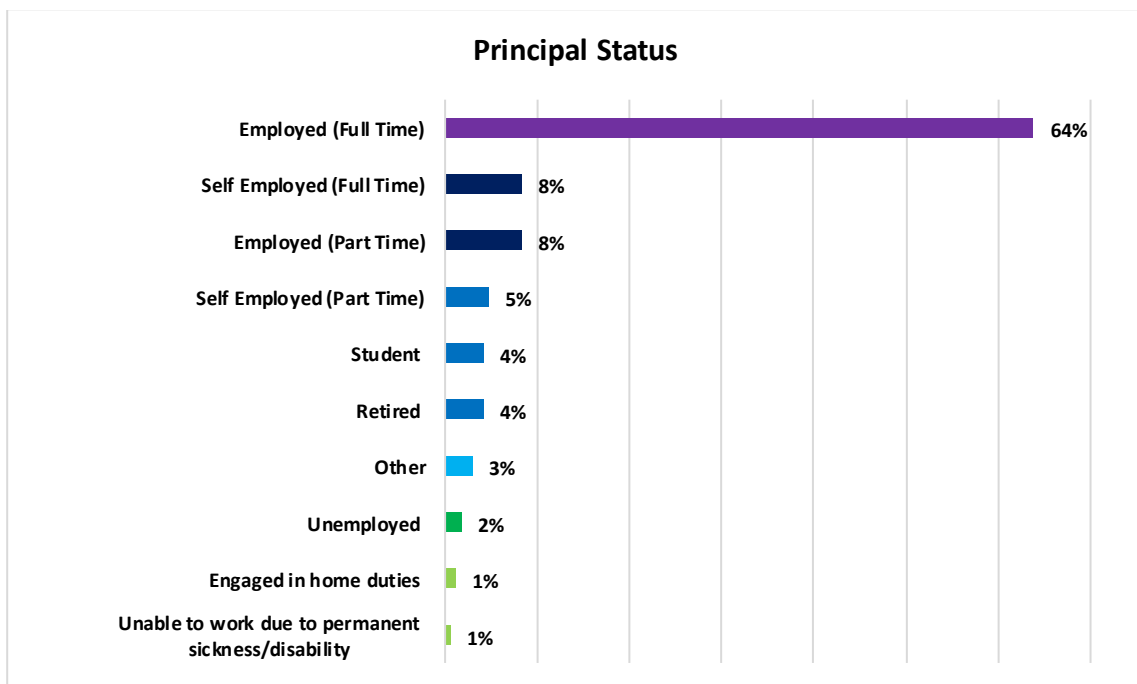
Figure 9-1: Principal Economic Status
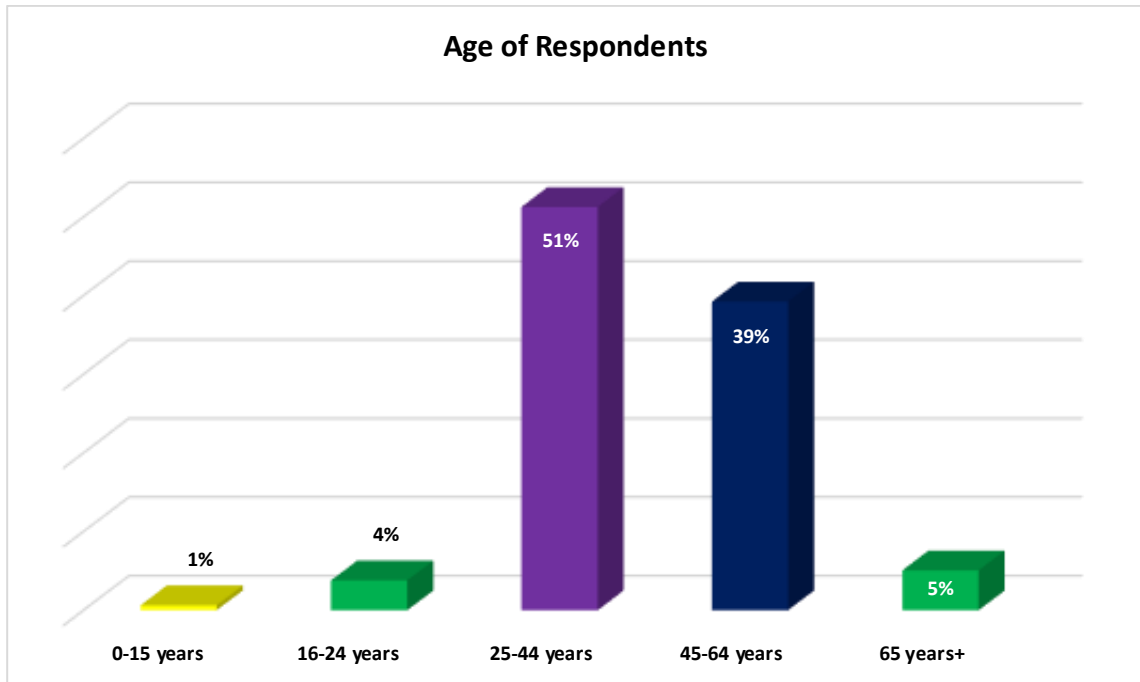
Age of Respondents

Figure 9-2: Age of Respondents

Connection with Sligo
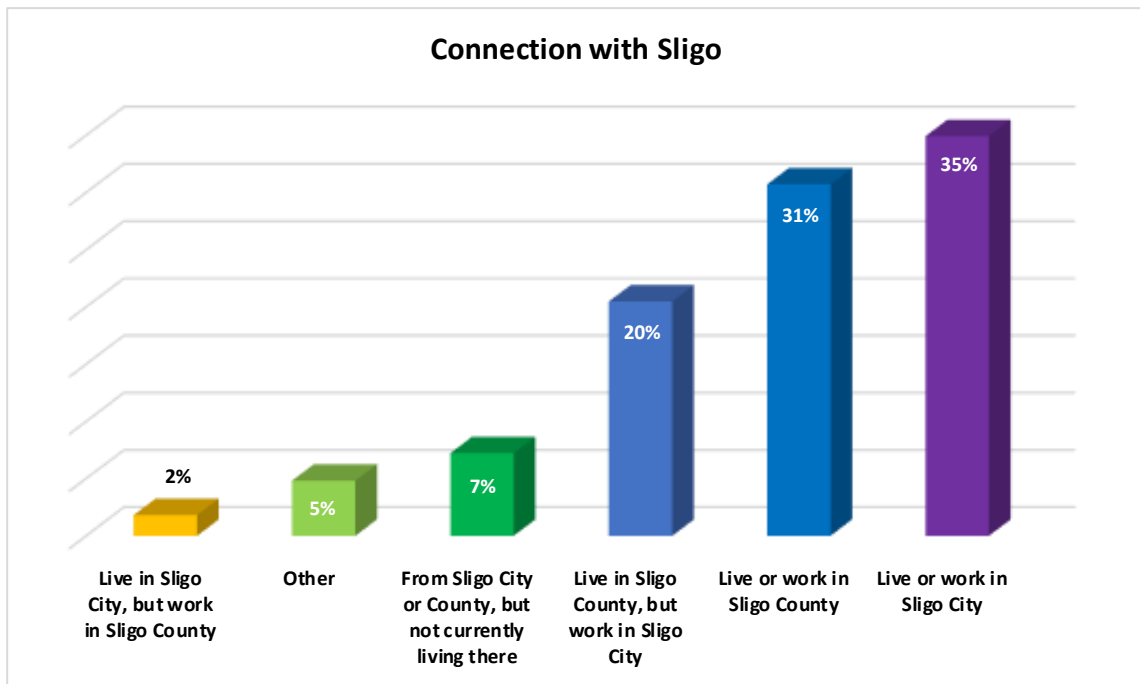
Figure 9-3: Connection with Sligo
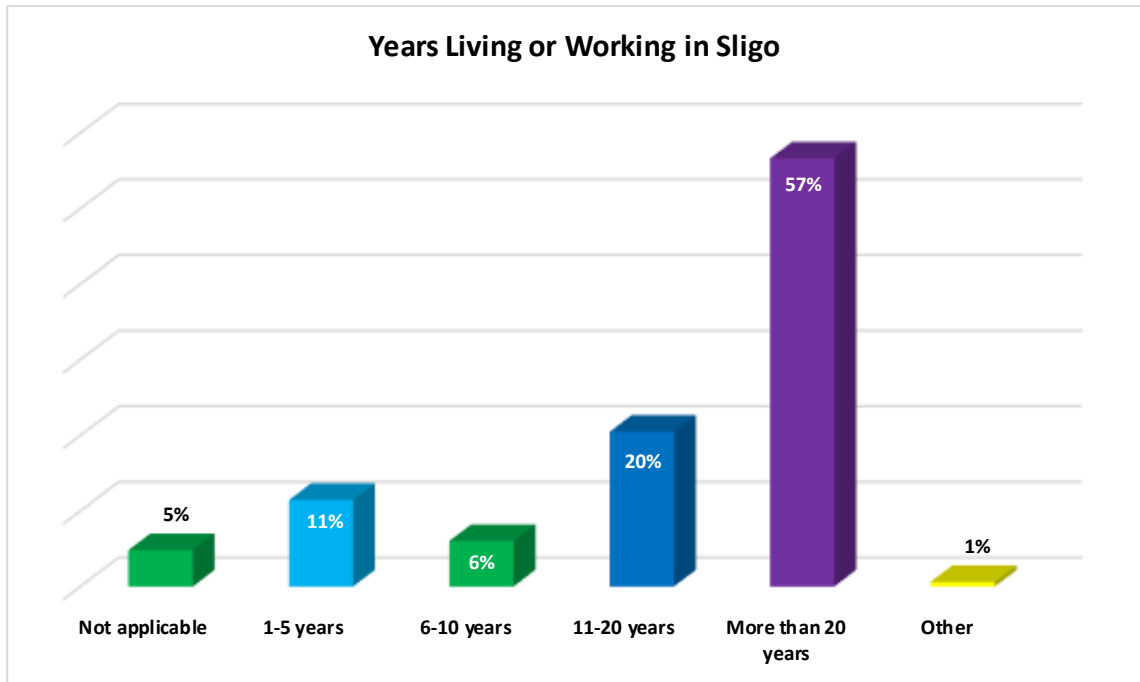
Figure 9-4: Years Living or Working in Sligo
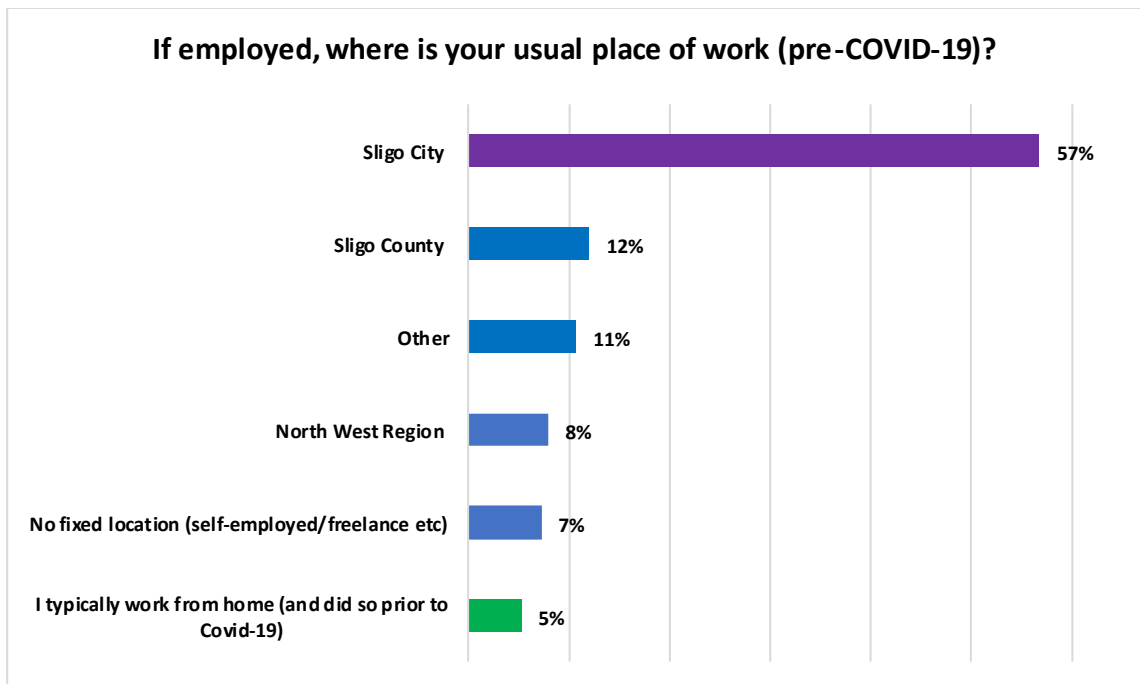
Figure 9-5: Location of Employment Pre-COVID

Working from Home Preferences
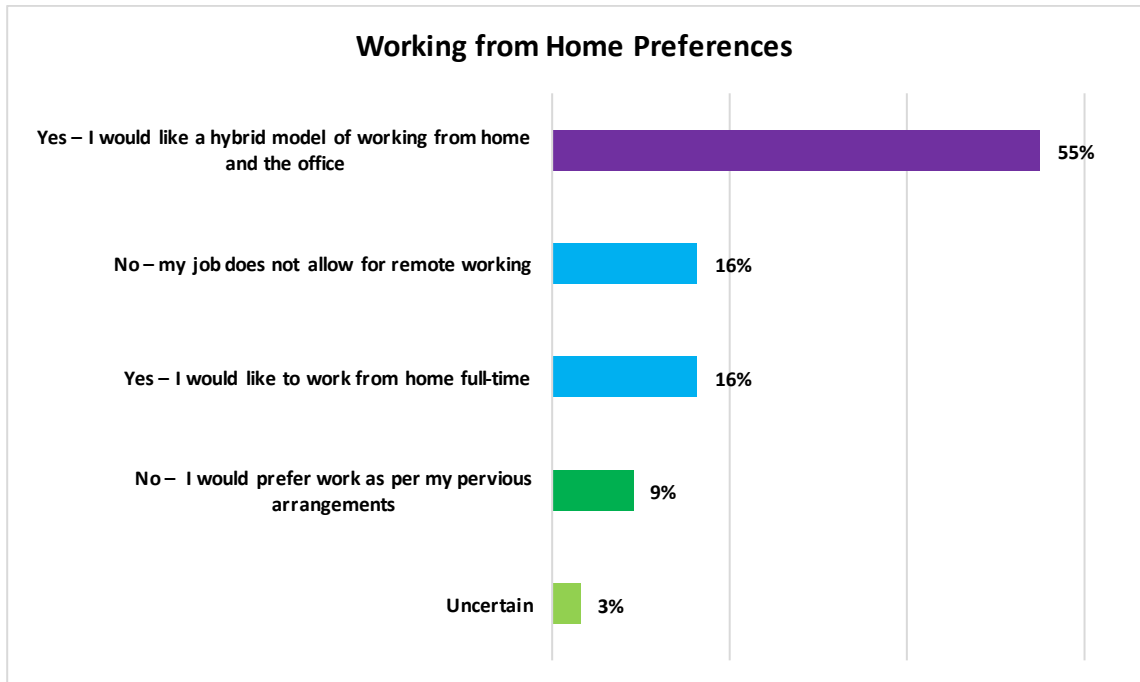
Figure 9-6: Working from Home Preferences

What are Sligo's greatest assets? Top 3 Frequencies
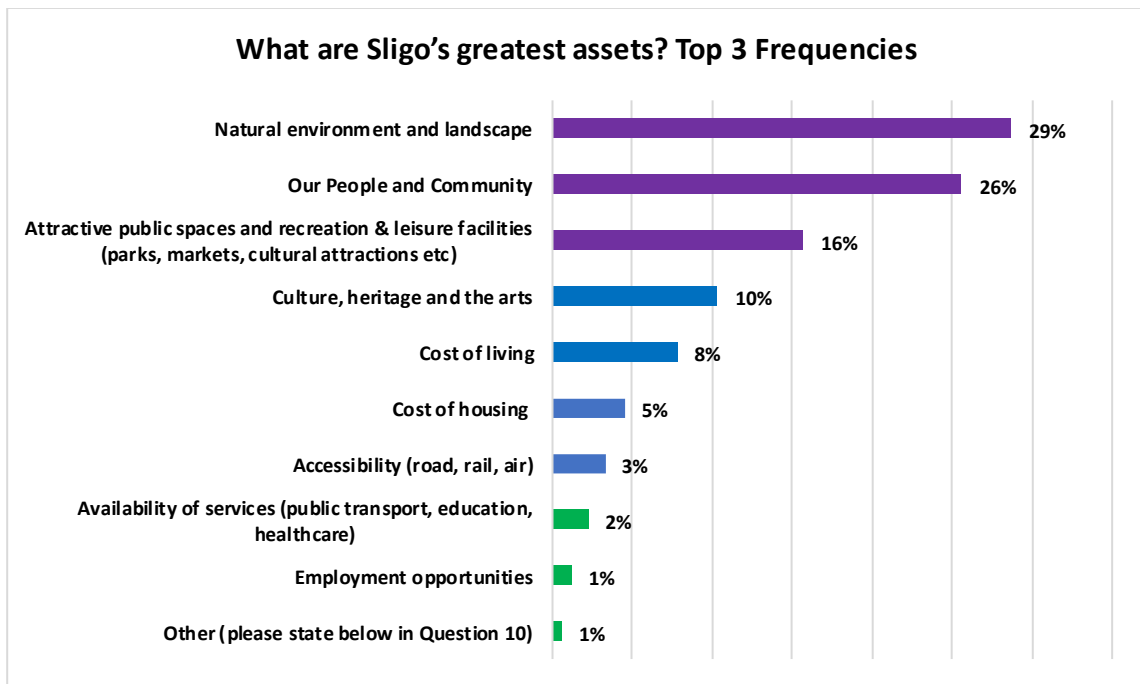
Figure 9-7: Sligo's Greatest Assets
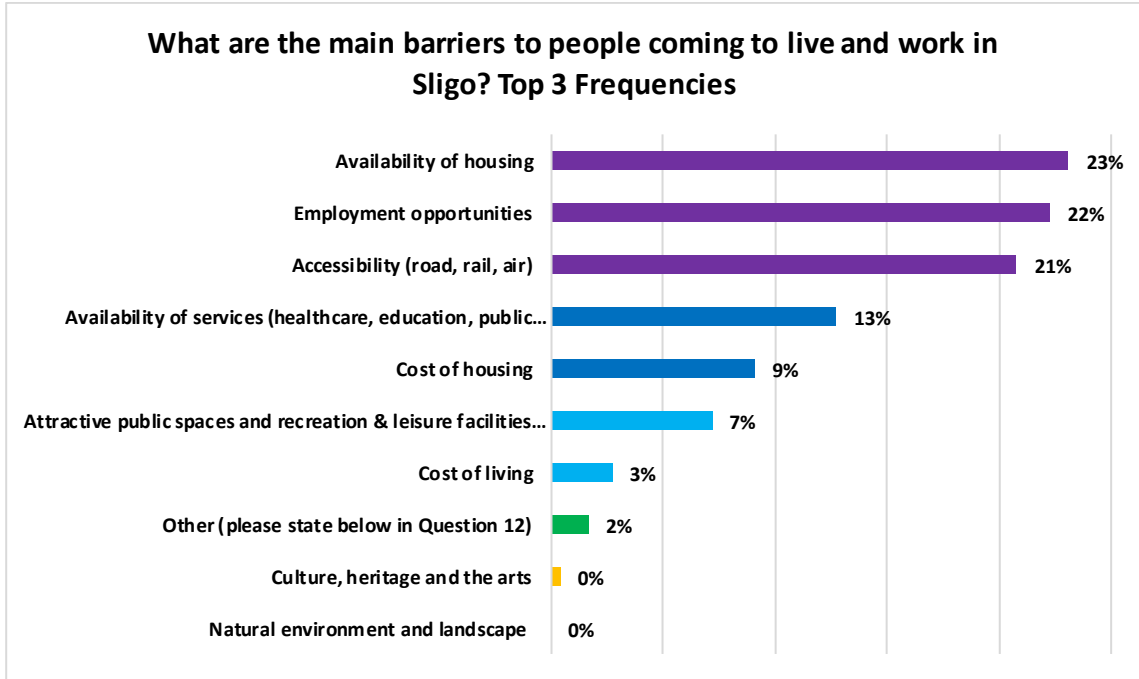
Figure 9-8: Main barriers to people coming to live and work in Sligo
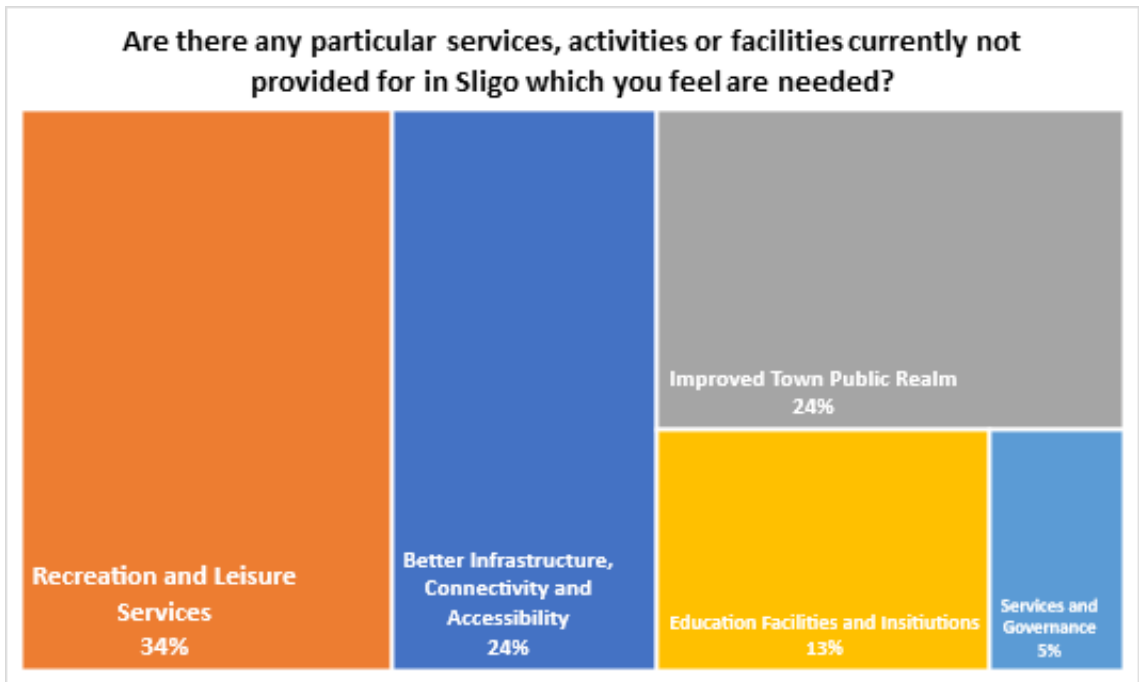
Figure 9-9: Needed services, activities or facilities currently not provided for in Sligo
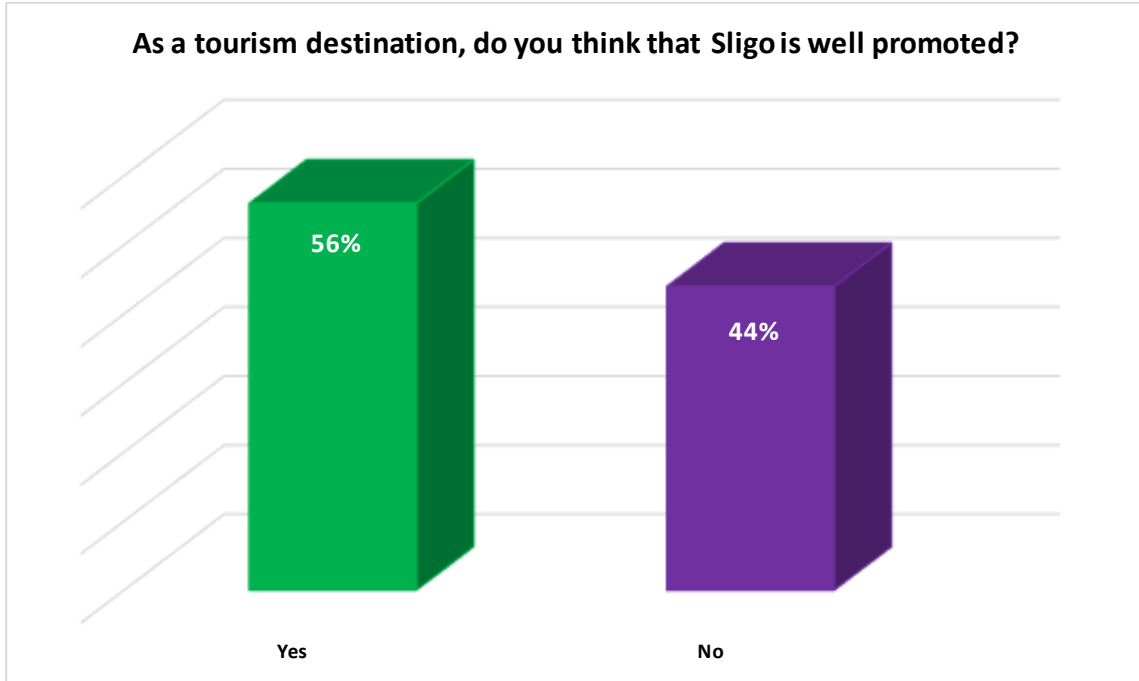
Figure 9-10: Sligo's Promotion as Tourism Destination

Figure 9-11: Enhancement of Sligo's Tourism Potential
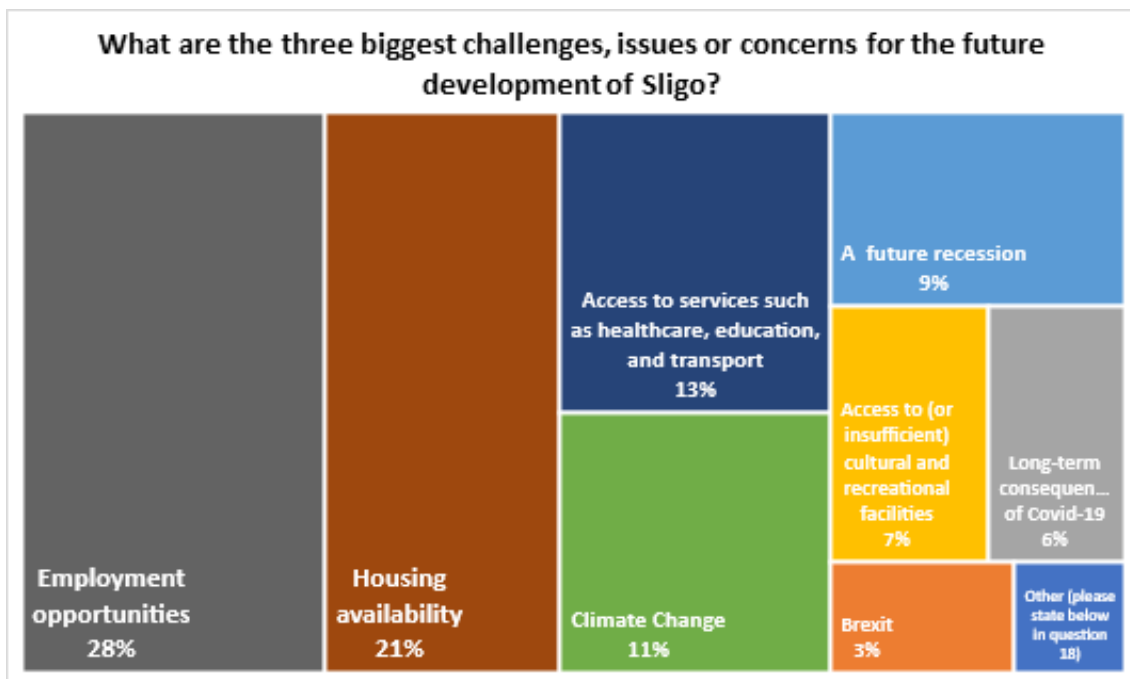
Figure 9-12: Biggest challenges, issues or concerns for the future development of Sligo
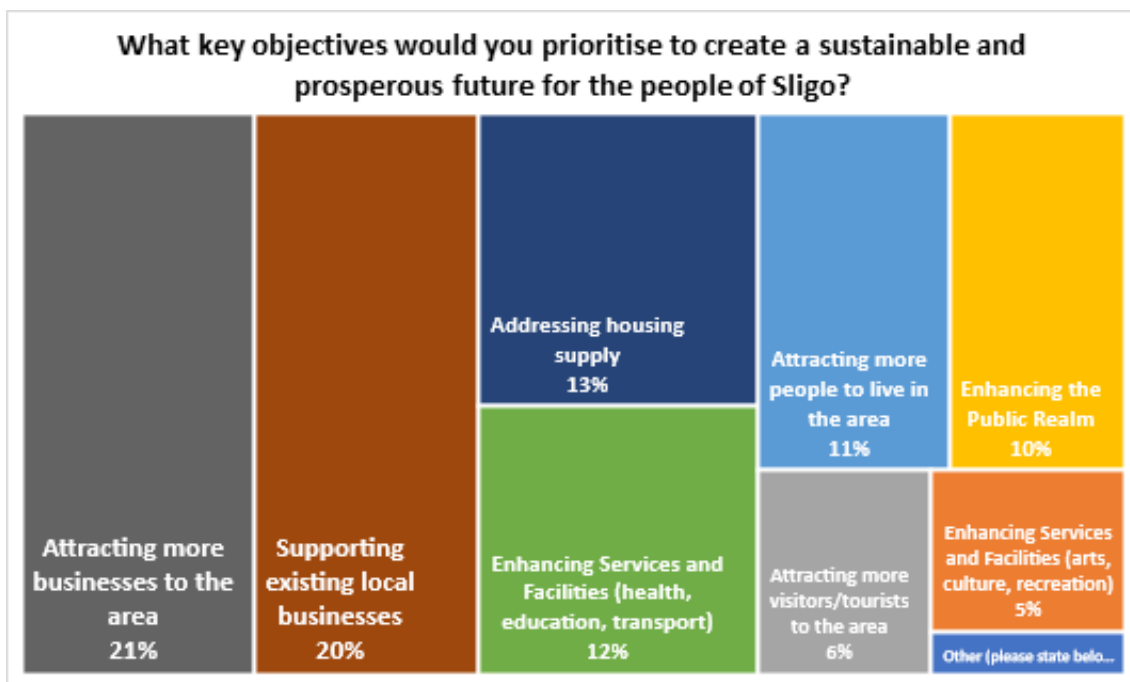
Figure 9-13: Key objectives to prioritise to create a sustainable and prosperous future for the people of Sligo

How would you rank your community's access to the following:
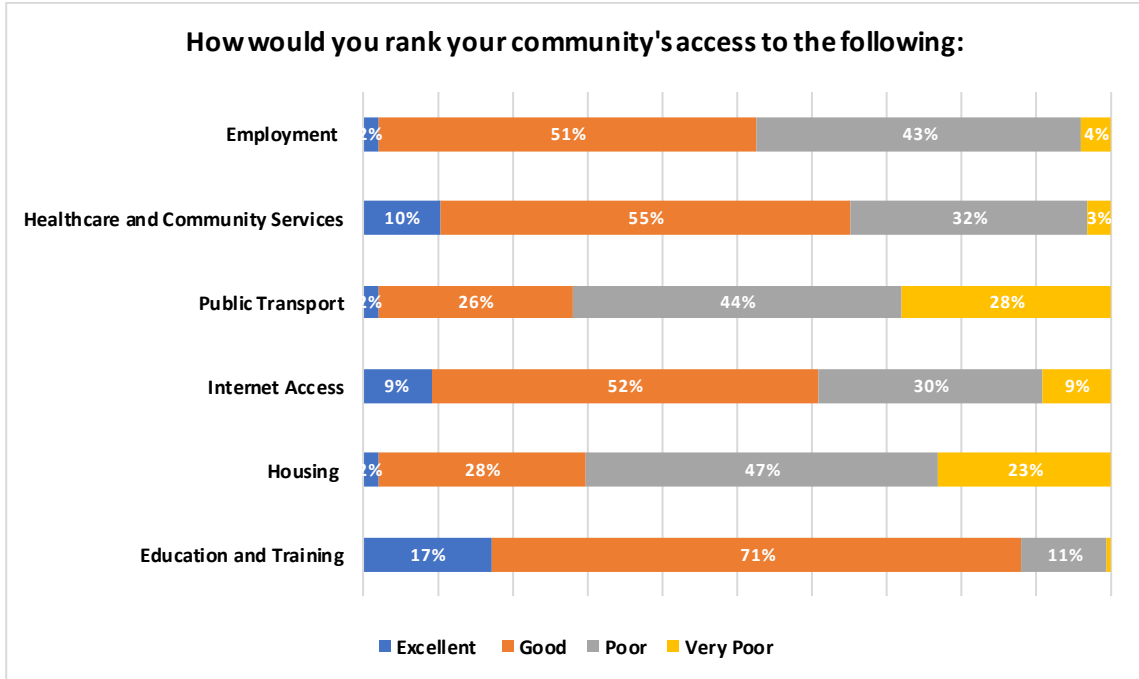
Figure 9-14: Ranking of community's access to services

Do you agree with the statement "people of all age groups, backgrounds and areas enjoy a good quality of life in Sligo"?
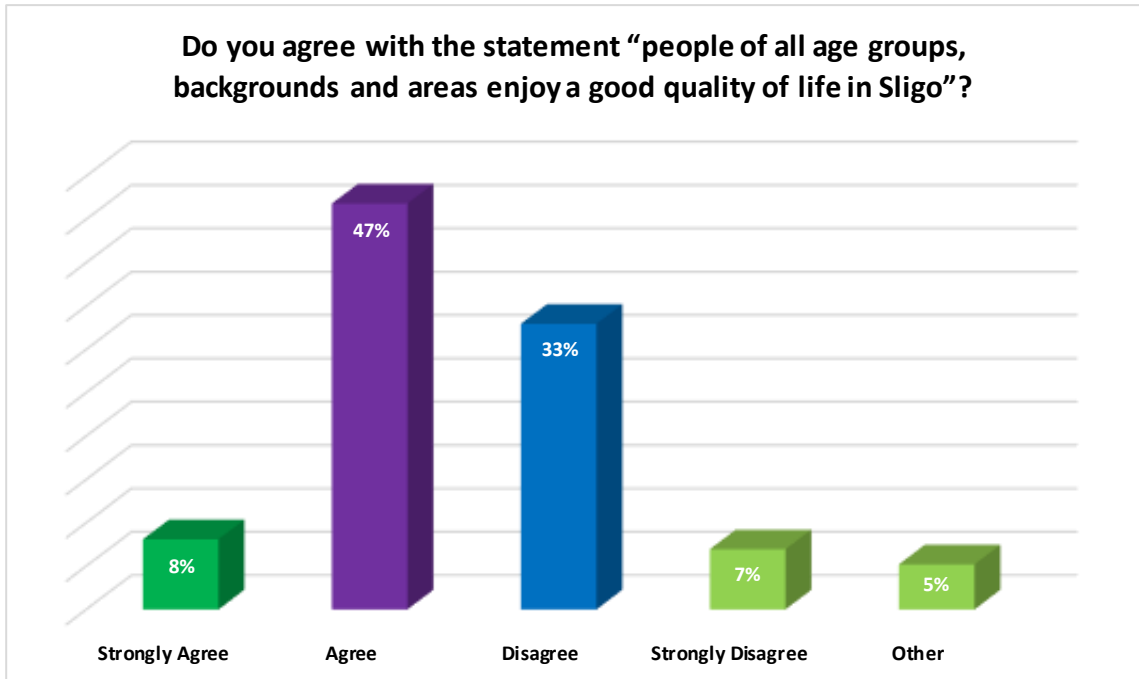
Figure 9-15: Agreement with statement: "people of all age groups, backgrounds and areas enjoy a good quality of life in Sligo"?
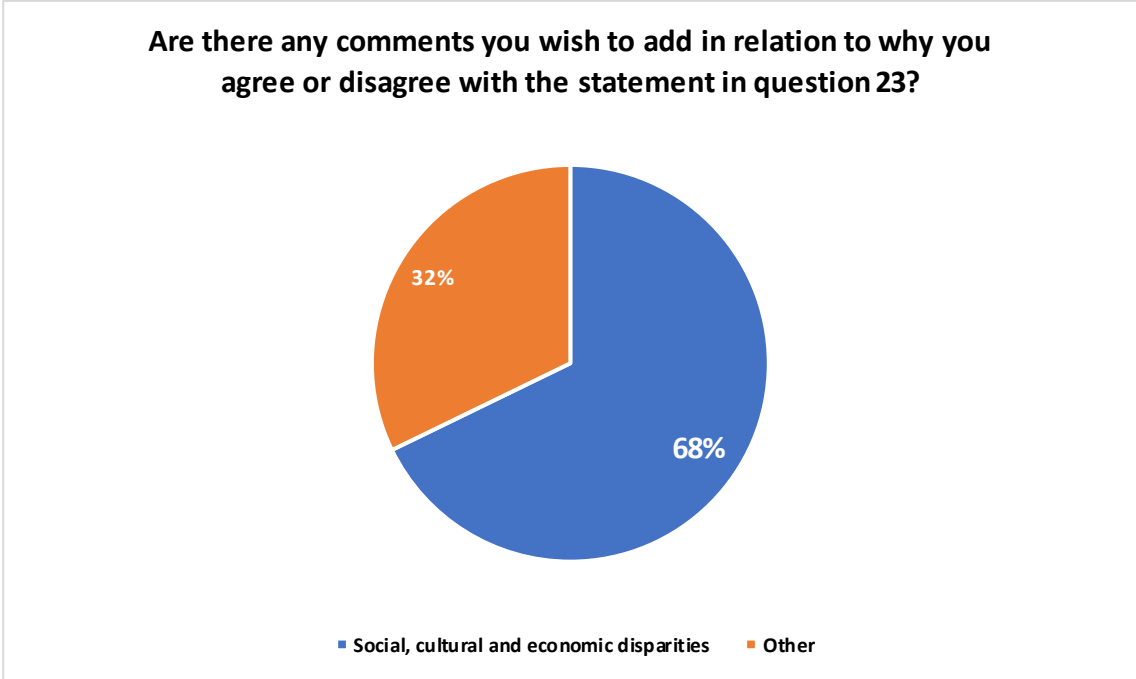
Figure 9-16: Additional Comments
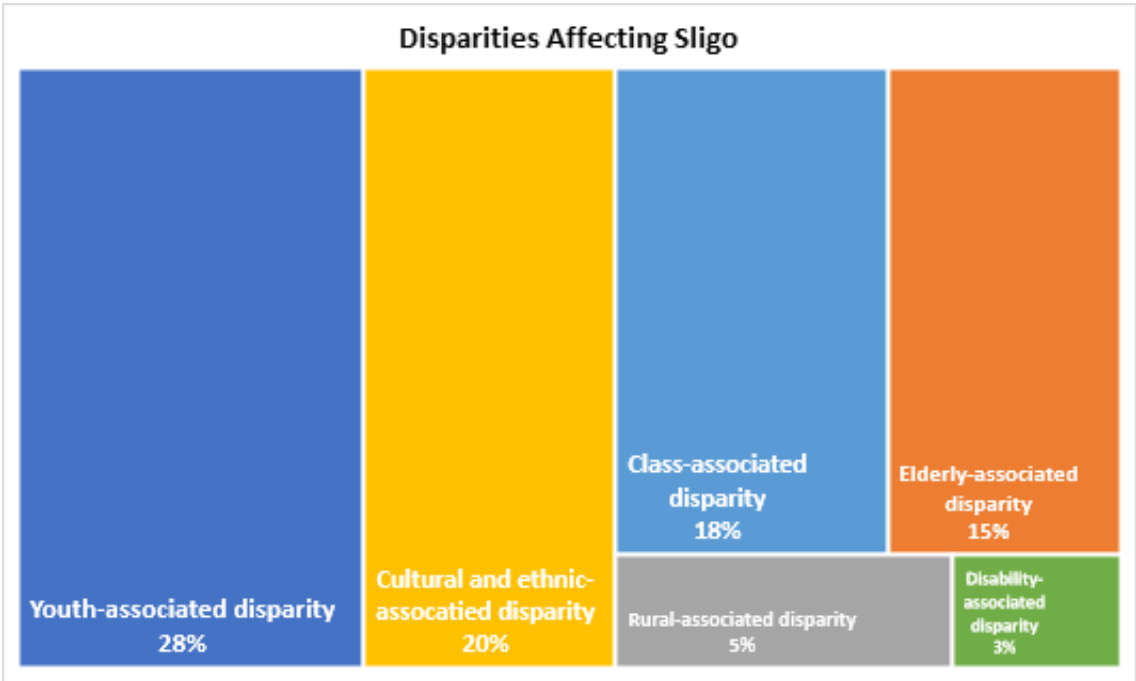
Figure 9-17: Disparities Affecting Sligo

Do you agree with the statement that "Sligo is supportive and inclusive for minority communities"?
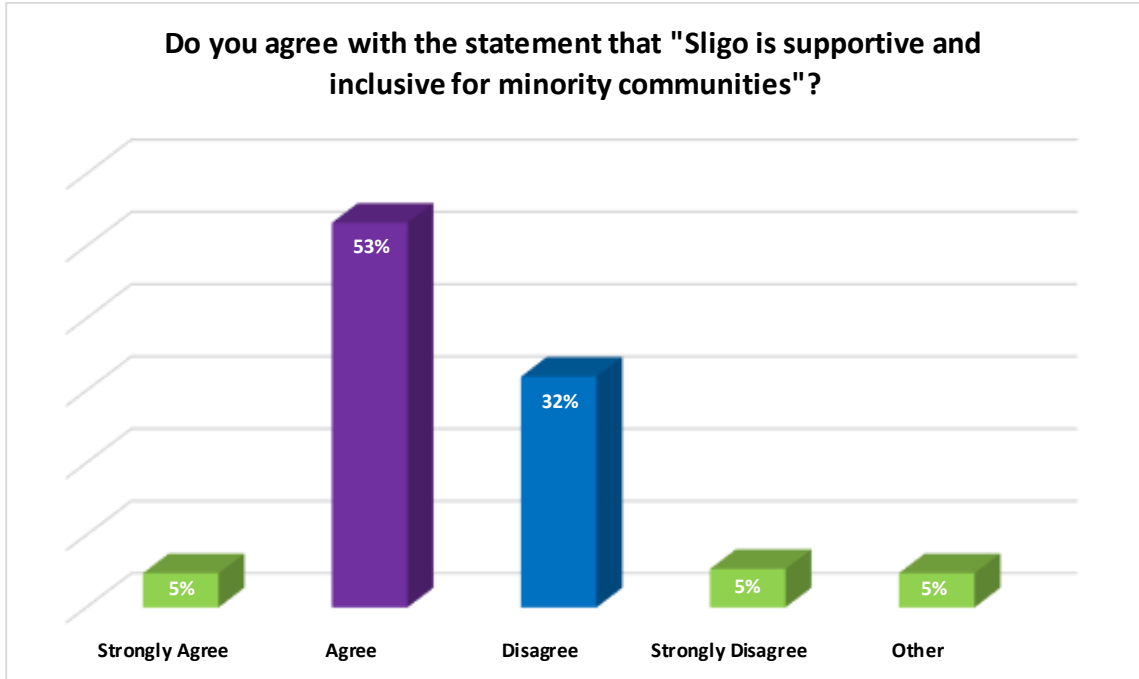
Figure 9-18: Agreement with Statement: "Sligo is supportive and inclusive for minority communities"?
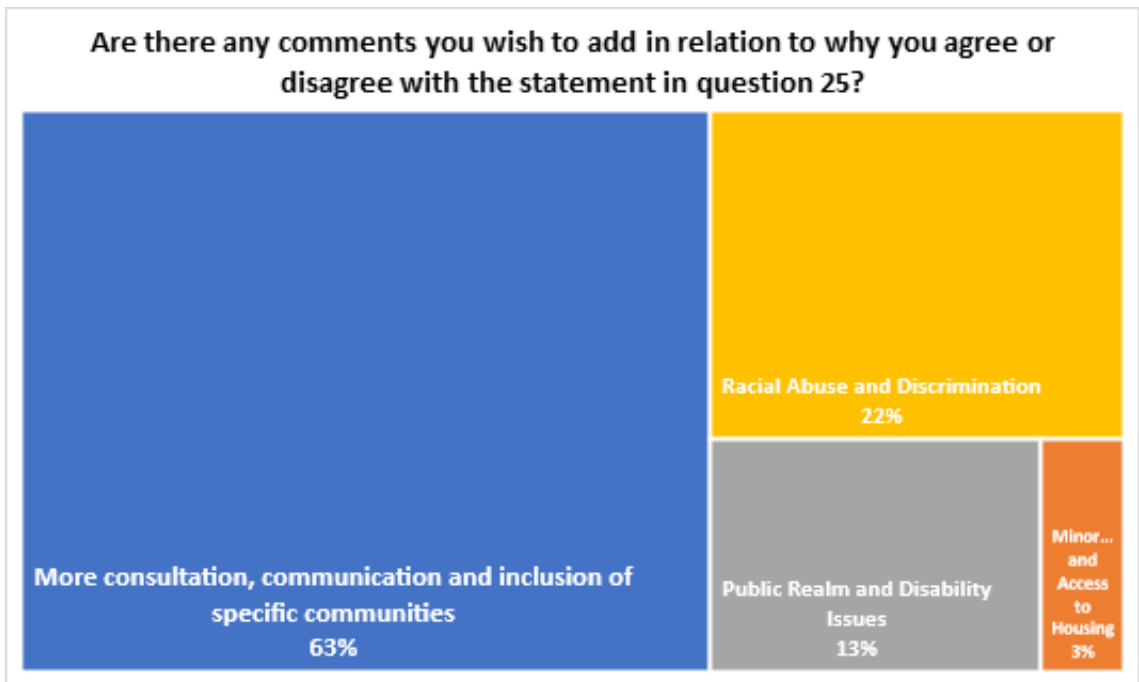
Figure 9-19: Additional Comments

What supports do we need for women to ensure equality of opportunity and a society where women feel honoured and respected? Top 3 Frequencies

Category	Percentage
Greater opportunities for women in employment	22%
Childcare for women to access training and education	22%
A dedicated Women's health centre	21%
Greater opportunities for women as public representatives	16%
Greater opportunities to meet other women particularly women who are new to the area	13%
Other (please state below in Question 28)	6%

Figure 9-20: Supports needed for women to ensure equality of opportunity and a society where women feel honoured and respected

Key supports need for families within the community - Top 3 Frequencies

Category	Percentage
Affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare places and after-school clubs that enable parents, particularly women, to get involved in work, the community, policy making, etc	30%
More parent/carer and toddler groups to provide support and social outlets to parents and young children	24%
Kids play areas, indoors and/or outdoors, and recreational opportunities	21%
A new library, where it is comfortable to read or study	13%
A purpose built Family Resource Centre with space for parenting programmes, access visits, and parenting support	12%
Other (please state below in Question 30)	1%

Figure 9-21: Key supports need for families within the community
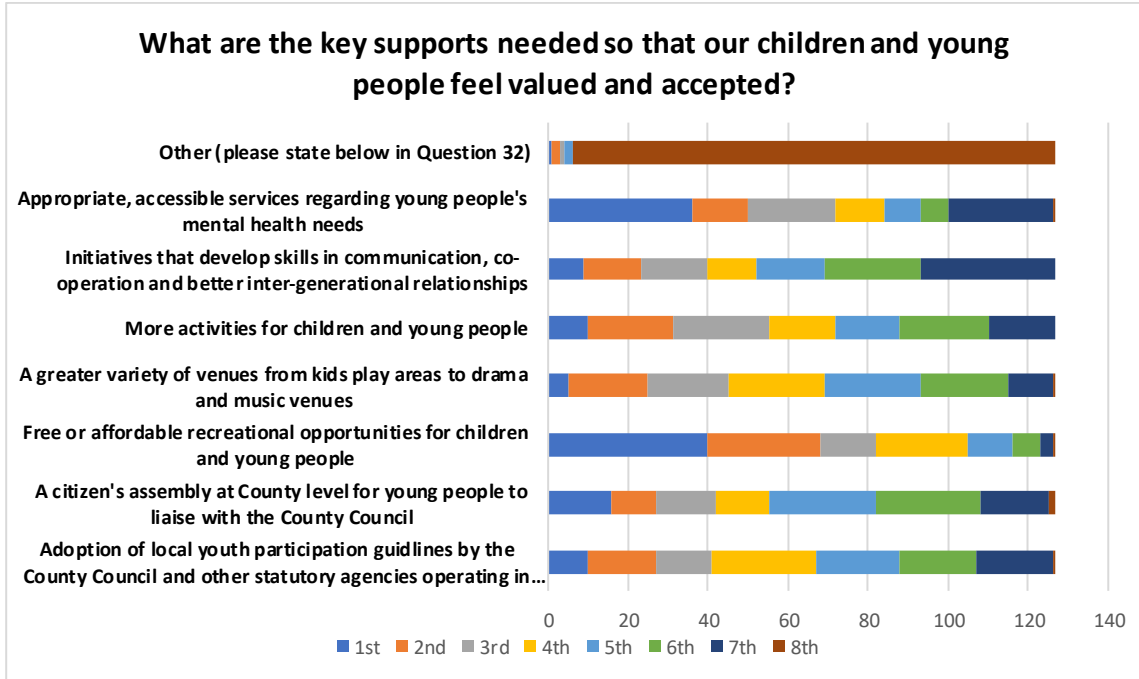
Figure 9-22: key supports needed so that our children and young people feel valued and accepted
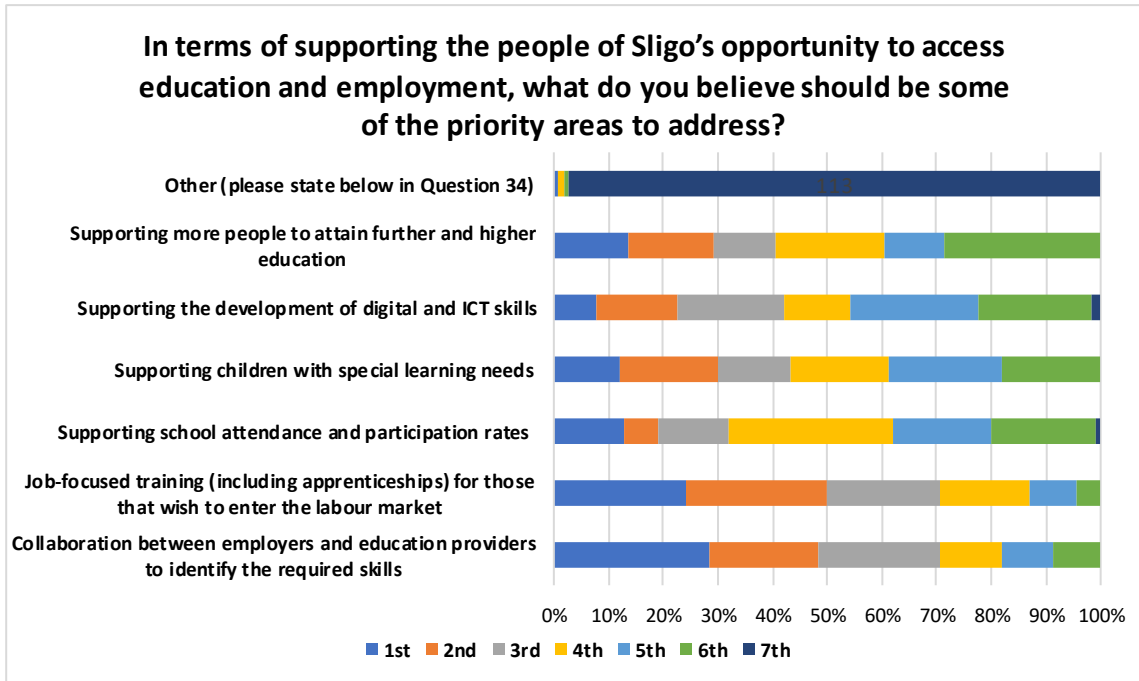
Figure 9-23: Priority Areas to Address Education and Employment in Sligo
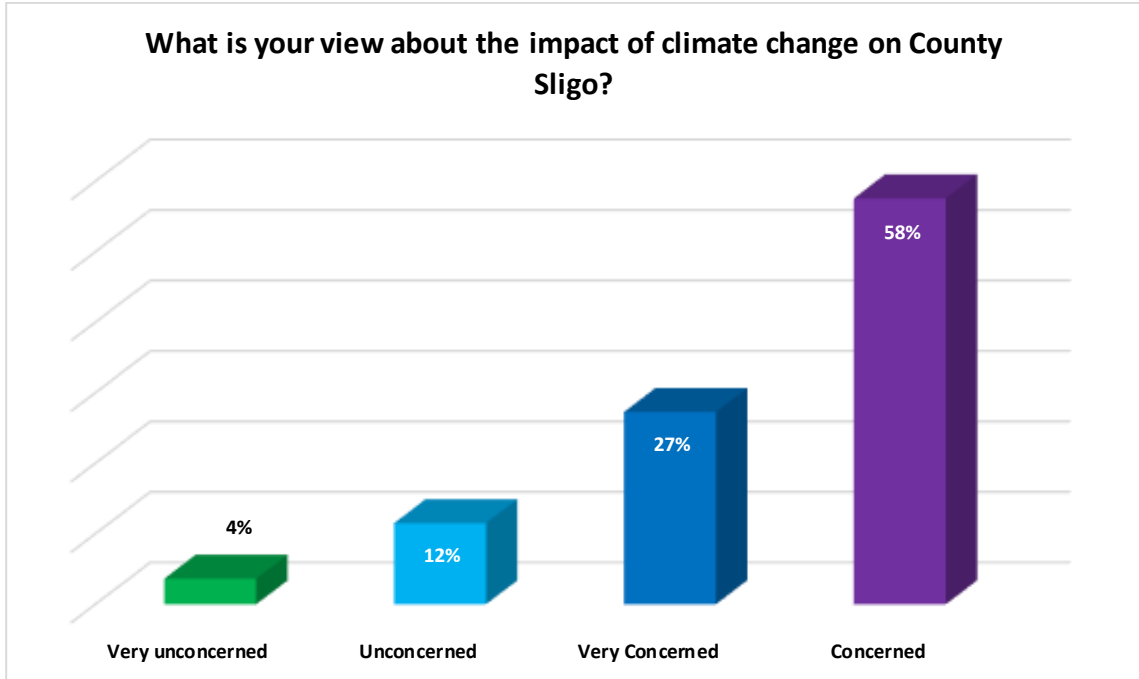
Figure 9-24: Views on the impact of climate change on County Sligo
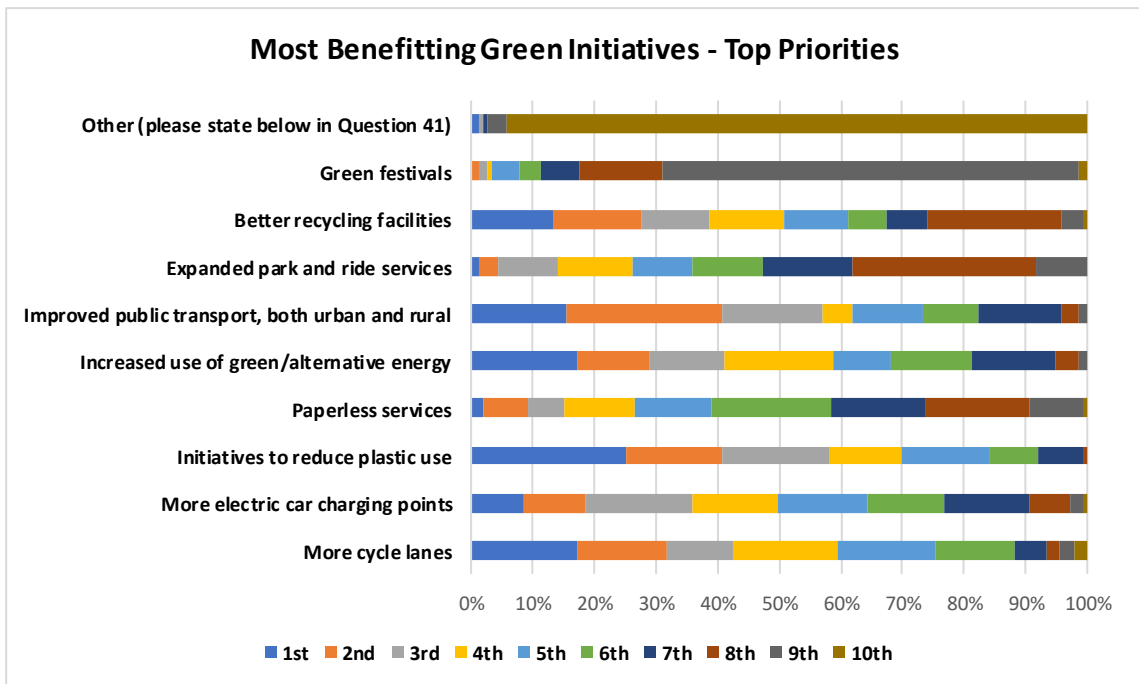
Figure 9-25: Most Benefitting Green Initiatives for Sligo
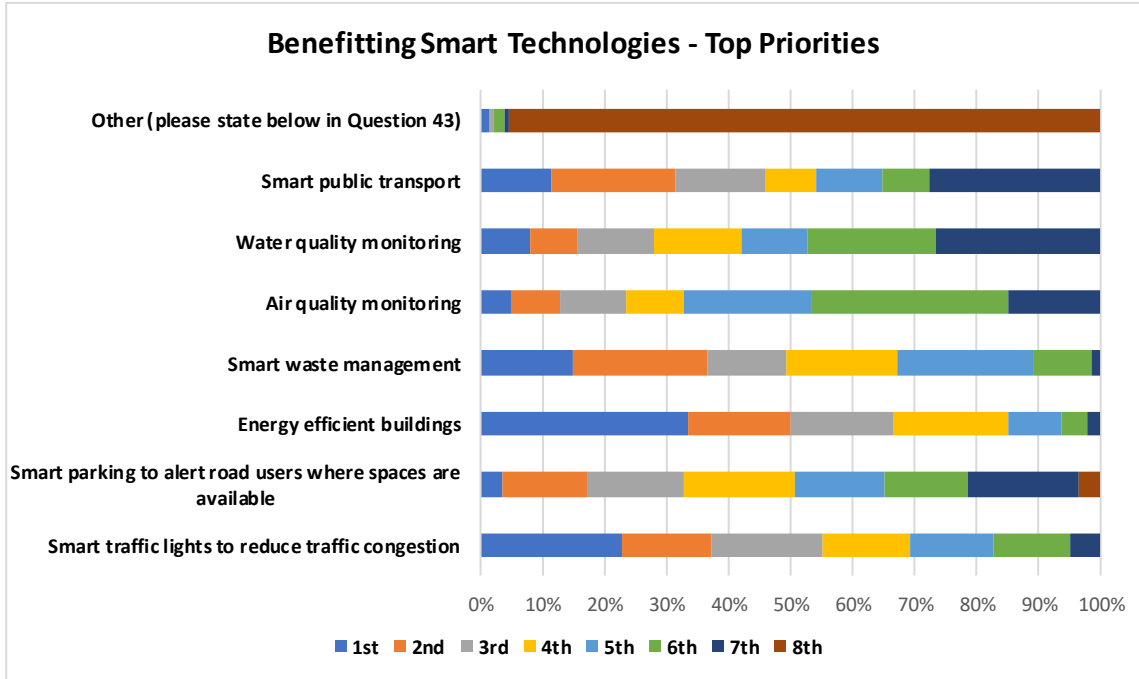
Figure 9-26: Benefitting Smart Technologies in Sligo
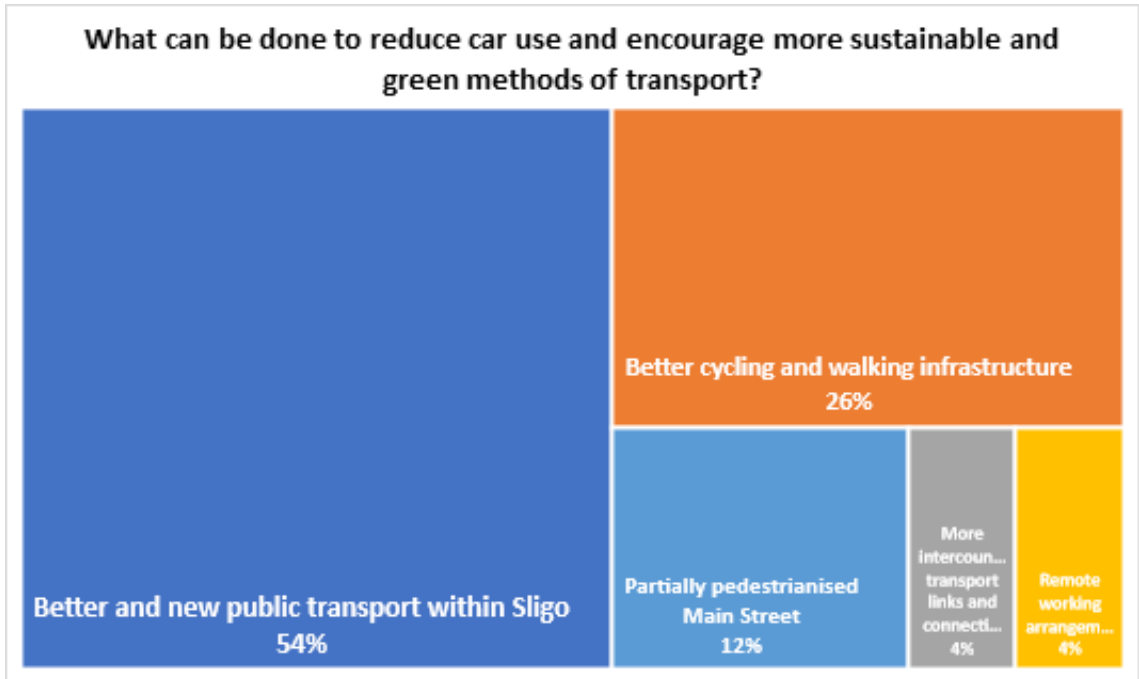
Figure 9-27: Initiatives to reduce car use and encourage more sustainable and green methods of transport

Figure 9-28: How to ensure that the public, local government, and private sector work collaboratively to develop Sligo
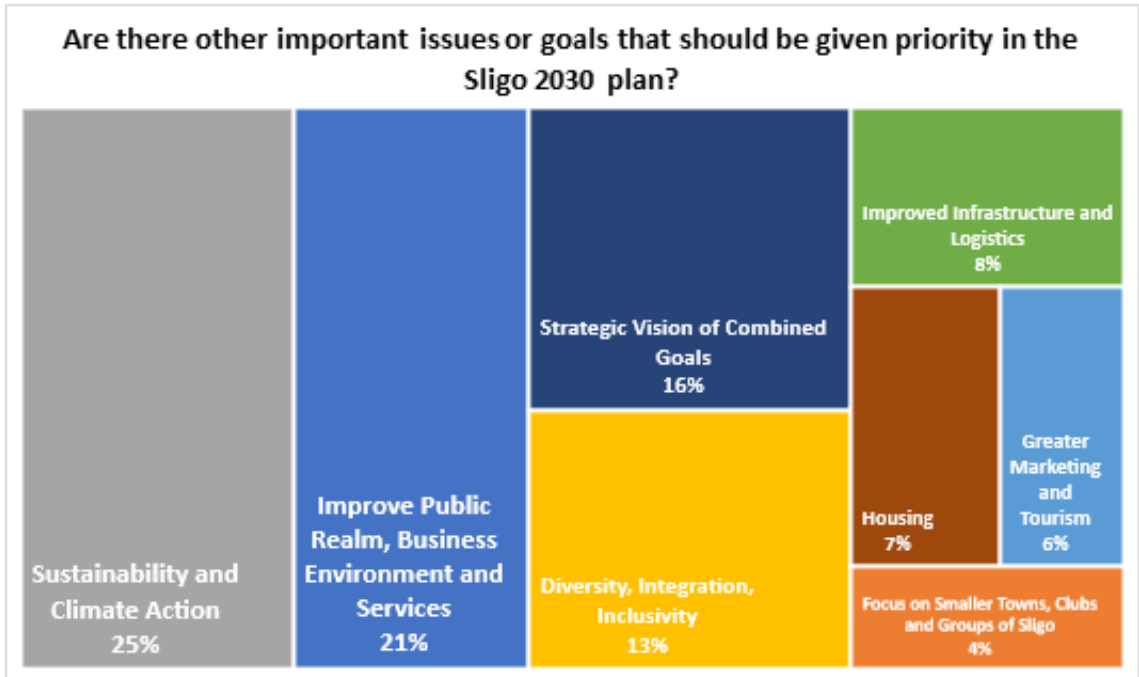
Figure 9-29: Other important issues or goals that should be given priority in the Sligo 2030 plan

Figure 9-30: Actions and objectives that will help to achieve these goals

9.2   Business Survey

The business survey garnered 47 responses over the course of the online submission window. These responses have been aggregated by question and are illustrated through charts below.

Location of Businesses / Organisations
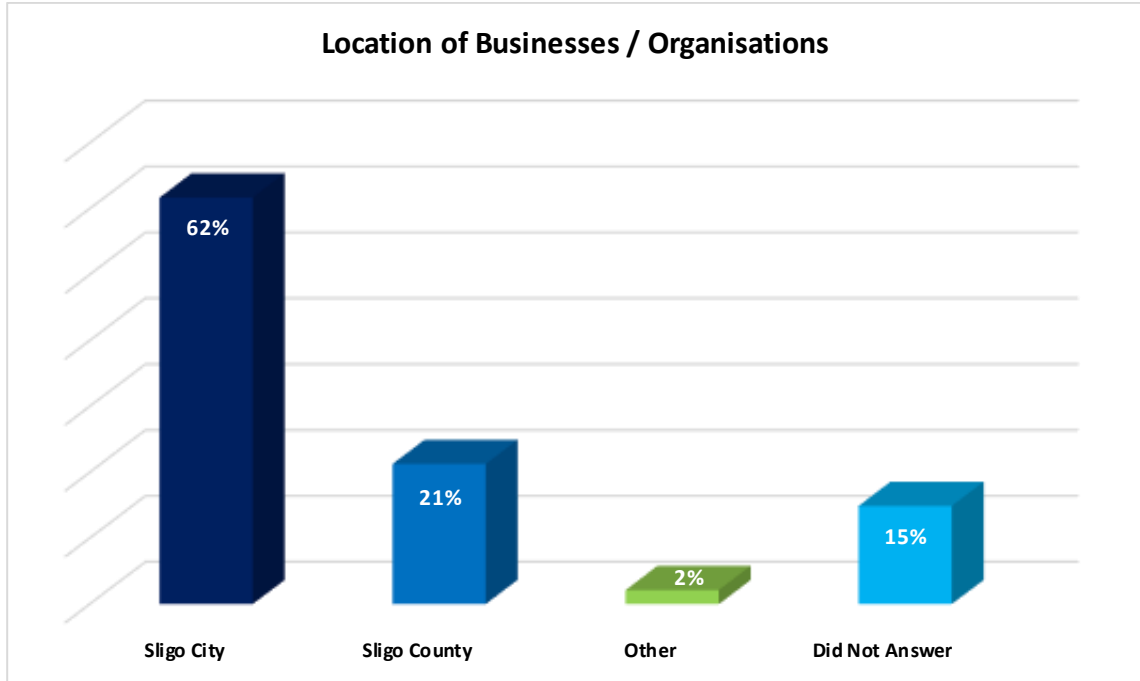
Figure 9-31: Location of Businesses / Organisations

Other Locations in Sligo
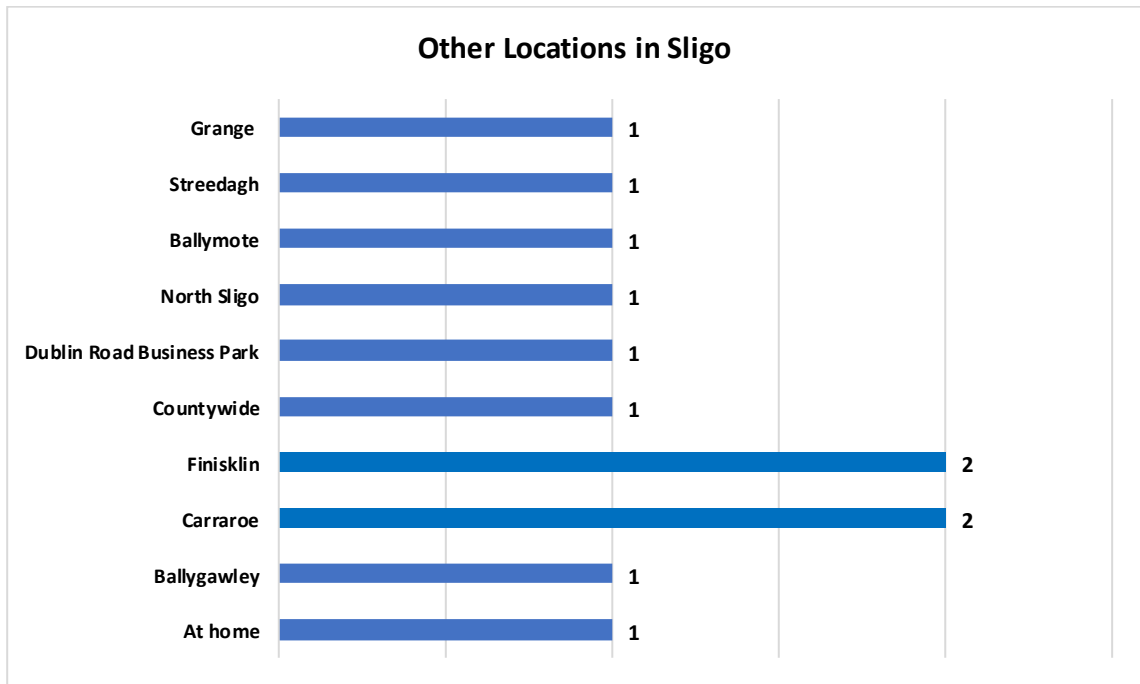
Figure 9-32: Other Locations in Sligo
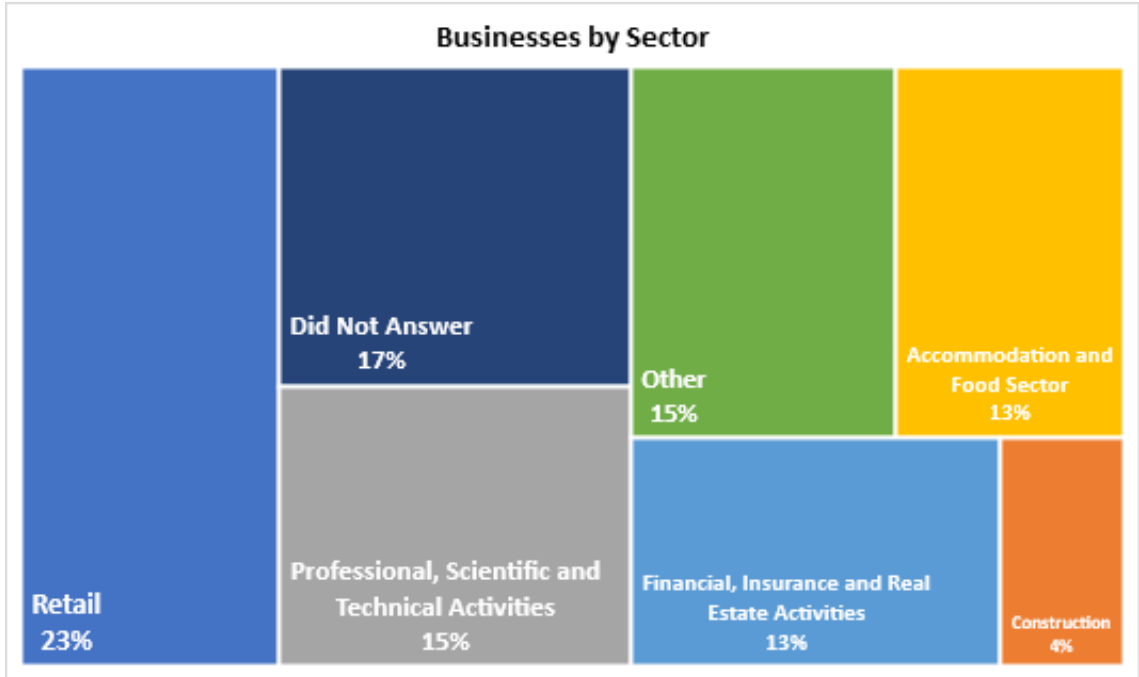
Figure 9-33: Businesses by Sector

Figure 9-34: Descriptions on how you sell to your customers
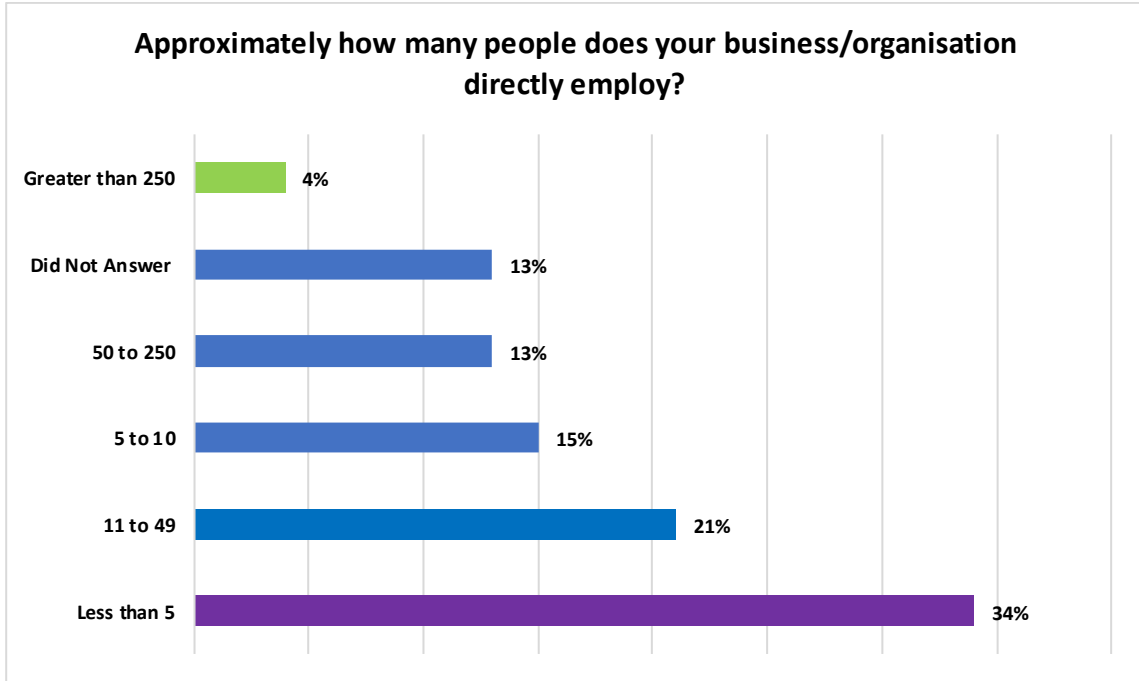
Figure 9-35: Number of people your business/organisation directly employ
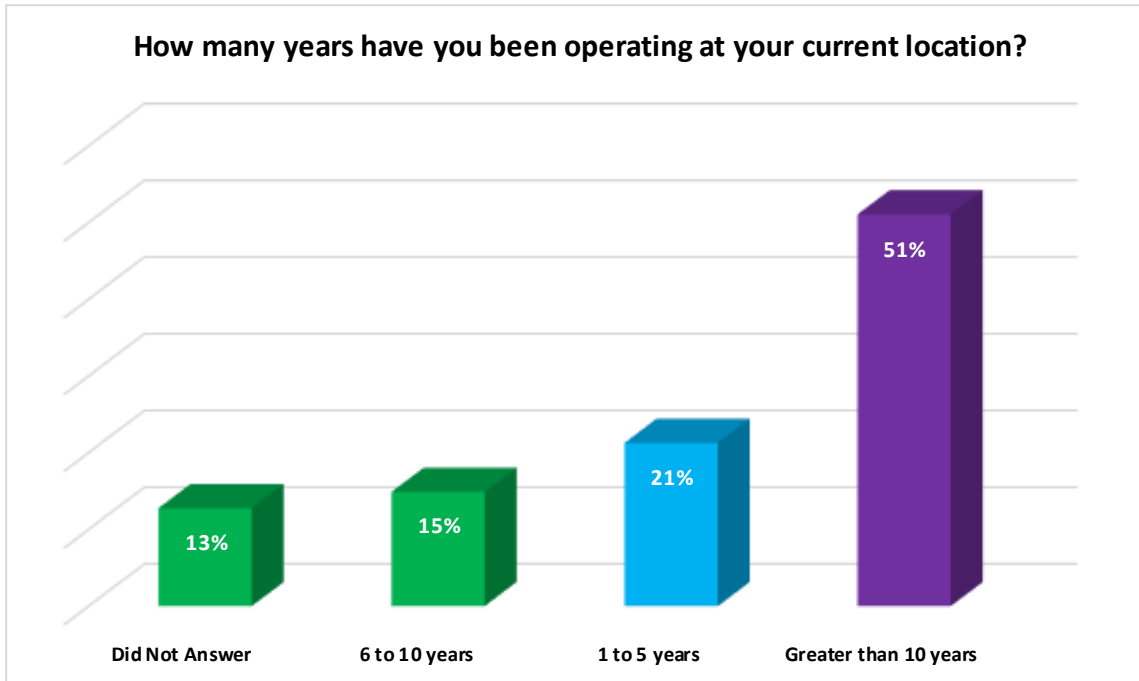
Figure 9-36: Number of years you have been operating at your current location
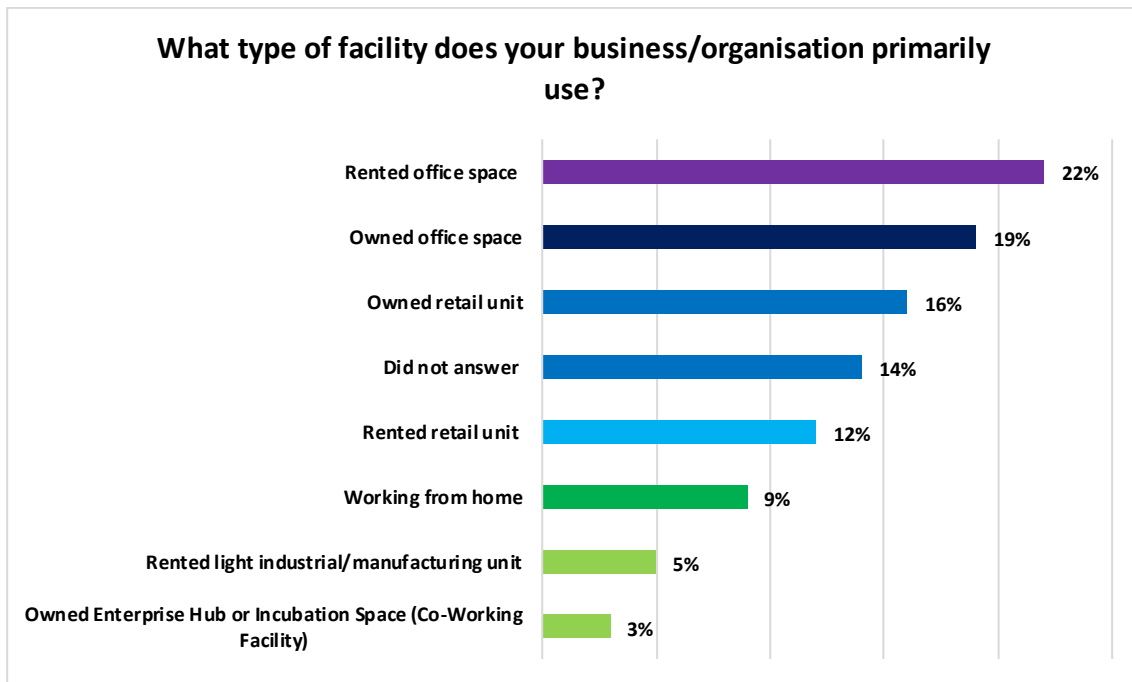
Figure 9-37: Type of facility your business/organisation primarily use

Figure 9-38: Response to the question: 'is Sligo an attractive place to do business?'

Business Strengths - Top 3 Frequencies

Cost of living — **22%**
Business Supports — **17%**
Cost of doing business — **16%**
Cost of housing — **15%**
Workforce availability — **12%**
Availability of office space (including serviced industrial/enterprise space) — **6%**
Growth potential and access to markets and customers — **4%**
Availability of services (public transport, education, healthcare) — **4%**
Other (please state below in Question 15) — **4%**
Accessibility (road, rail, air) — **2%**

Figure 9-39: Business Strengths

Business Constraints - Top 3 Frequencies

Availability of housing — **24%**
Accessibility (road, rail, air) — **21%**
Business Supports — **13%**
Workforce availability — **11%**
Growth potential and access to markets and customers — **10%**
Availability of services (public transport, education, healthcare) — **7%**
Availability of office space (including serviced industrial/enterprise space) — **5%**
Other (please state below in Question 15) — **4%**
Cost of doing business — **3%**
Cost of living — **2%**

Figure 9-40: Business Constraints

Business Challenges - Top 3 Frequencies

Challenge	%
Long-term consequences of Covid-19	24%
Brexit	21%
A future recession	14%
Accessibility (road, rail, air)	10%
Workforce availability	8%
Business Supports	7%
Other (please state below in Question 19)	6%
Cost of doing business	5%
Availability of office space (including serviced industrial/enterprise space)	4%
Climate Change	2%
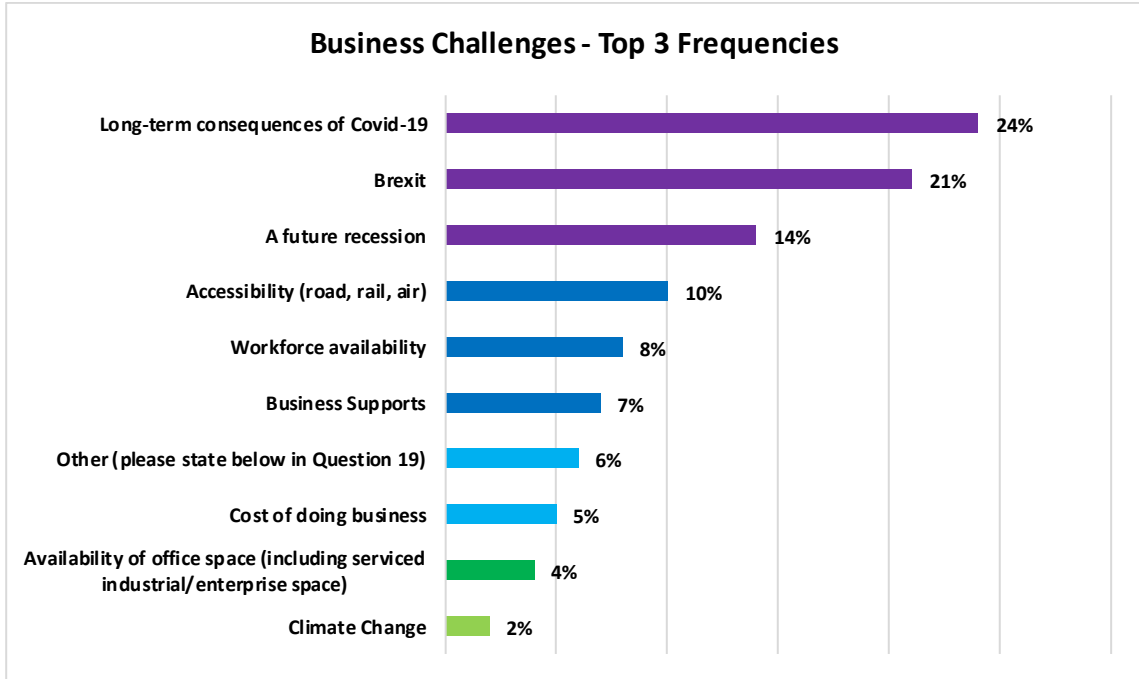
Figure 9-41: Business Challenges

Business Priorities - Top 3 Frequencies

Priority	%
Promoting a pro-business culture	28%
Providing the necessary infrastructure for businesses to succeed	27%
Providing enterprise support services to SMEs and micro-companies	17%
Supporting training and upskilling of the workforce to better match business needs	14%
Working with the IDA to attract Foreign Direct Investment	10%
Other (please state below in Question 21)	3%

Figure 9-42: Business Priorities
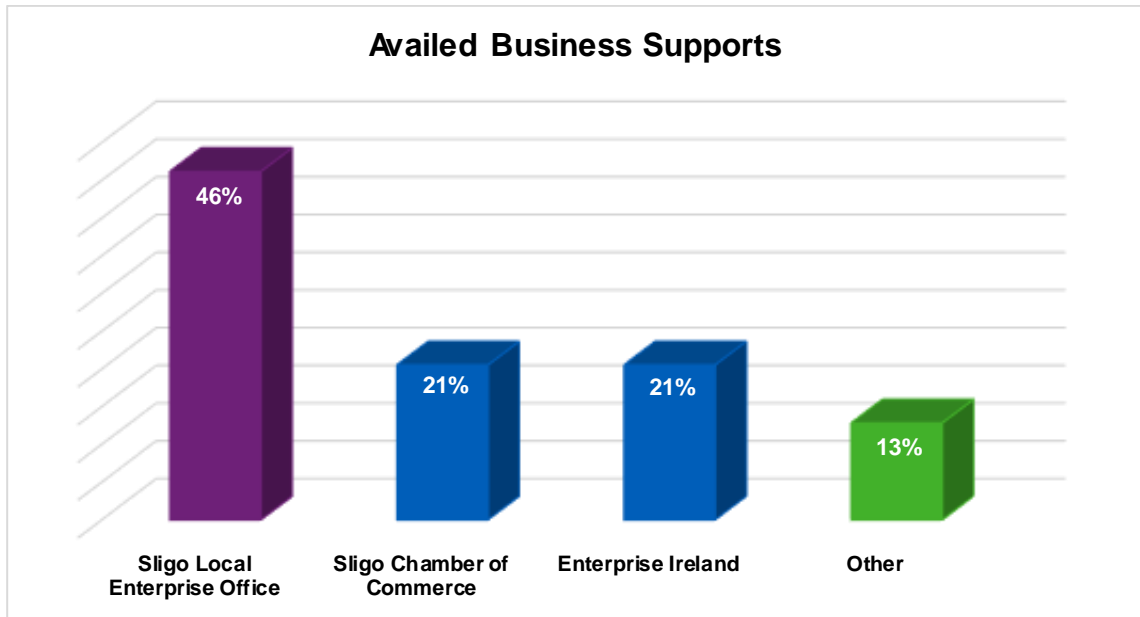
Figure 9-43: Availed Business Supports
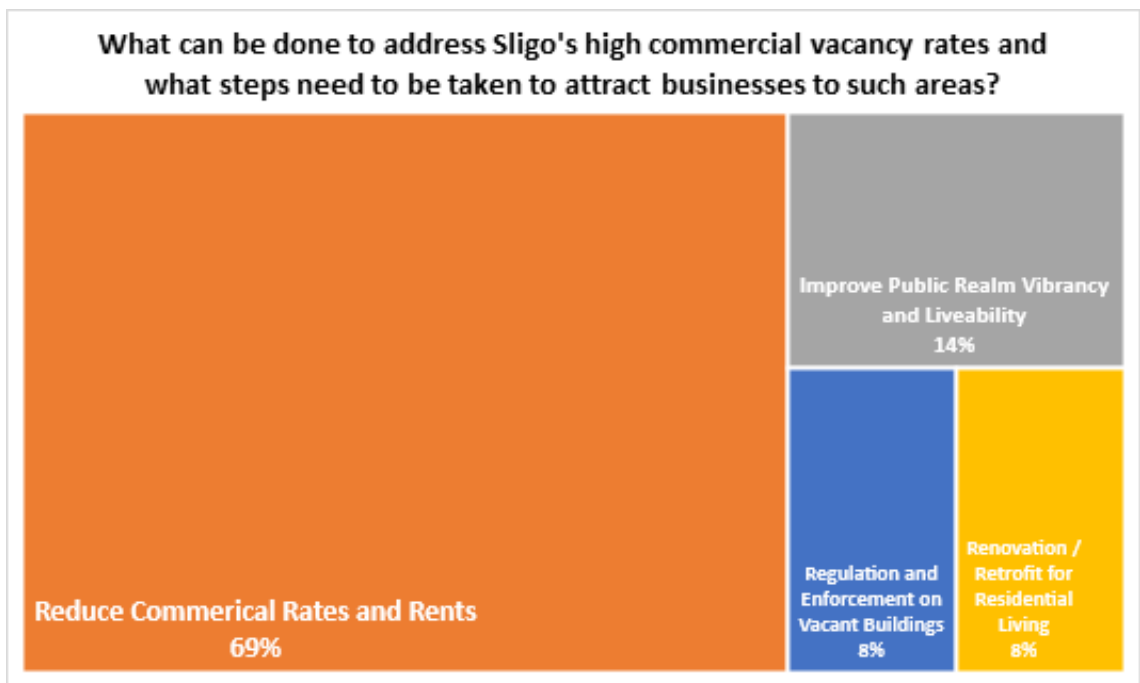
Figure 9-44: Steps to address Sligo's high commercial vacancy rates
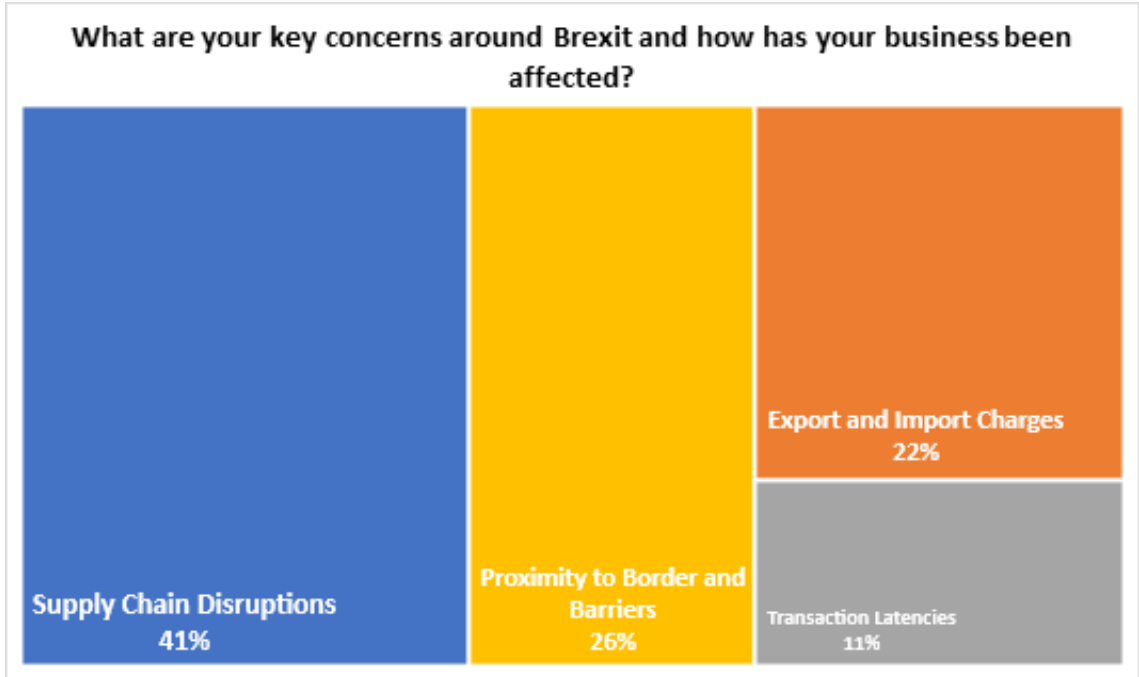
Figure 9-45: Key concerns around Brexit and how business has been affected
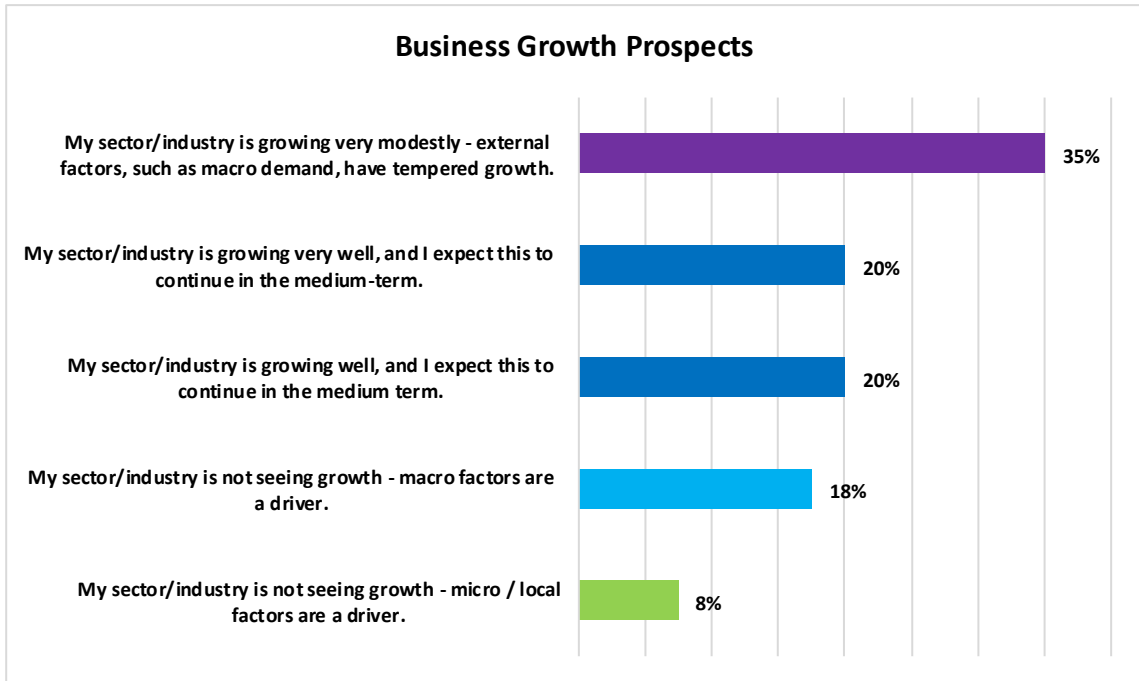
Figure 9-46: Business Growth Prospects

Climate Change Awareness
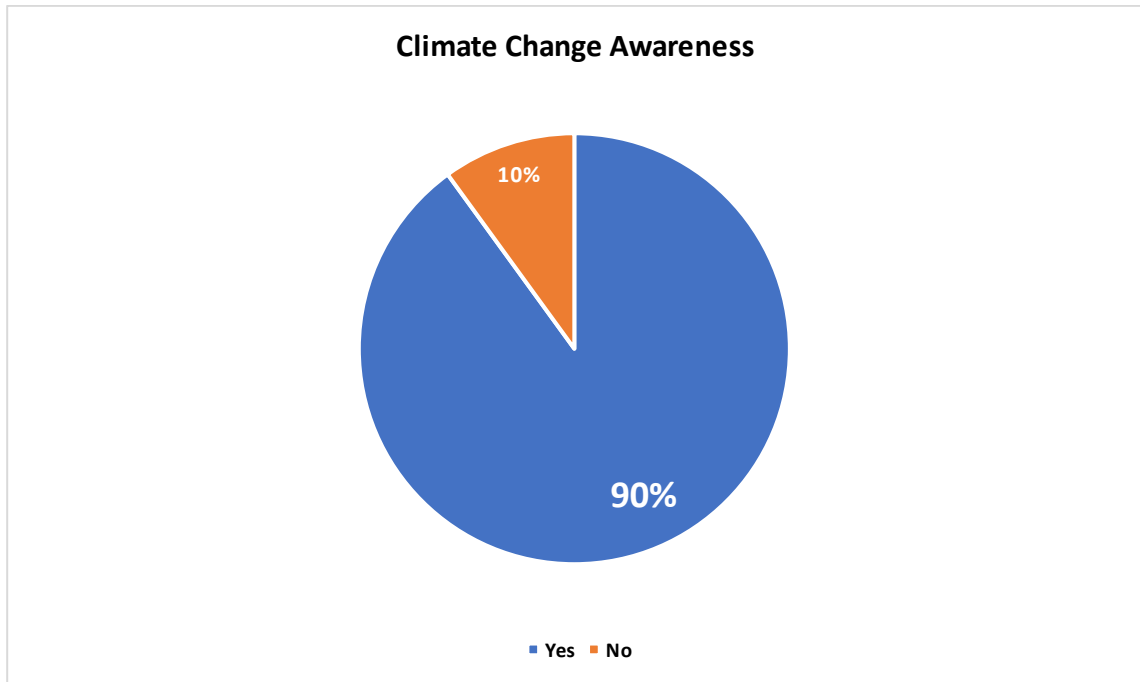
Figure 9-47: Climate Change Awareness

Are you aware of any supports available to help you go green?
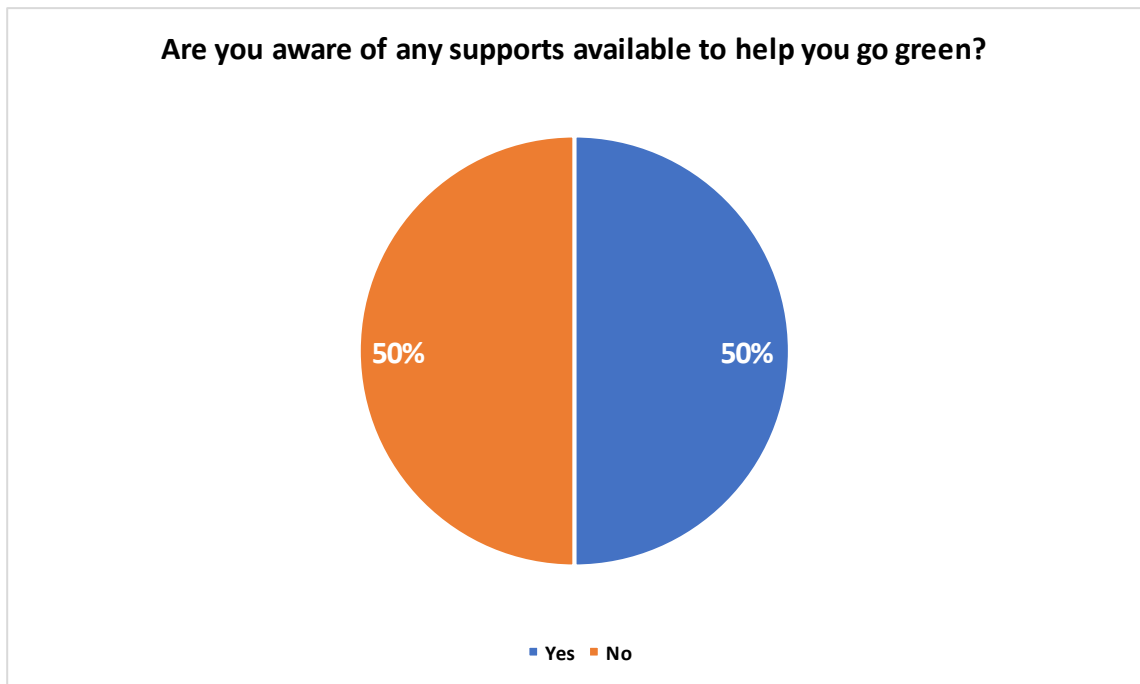
Figure 9-48: Awareness of supports available to help businesses go green
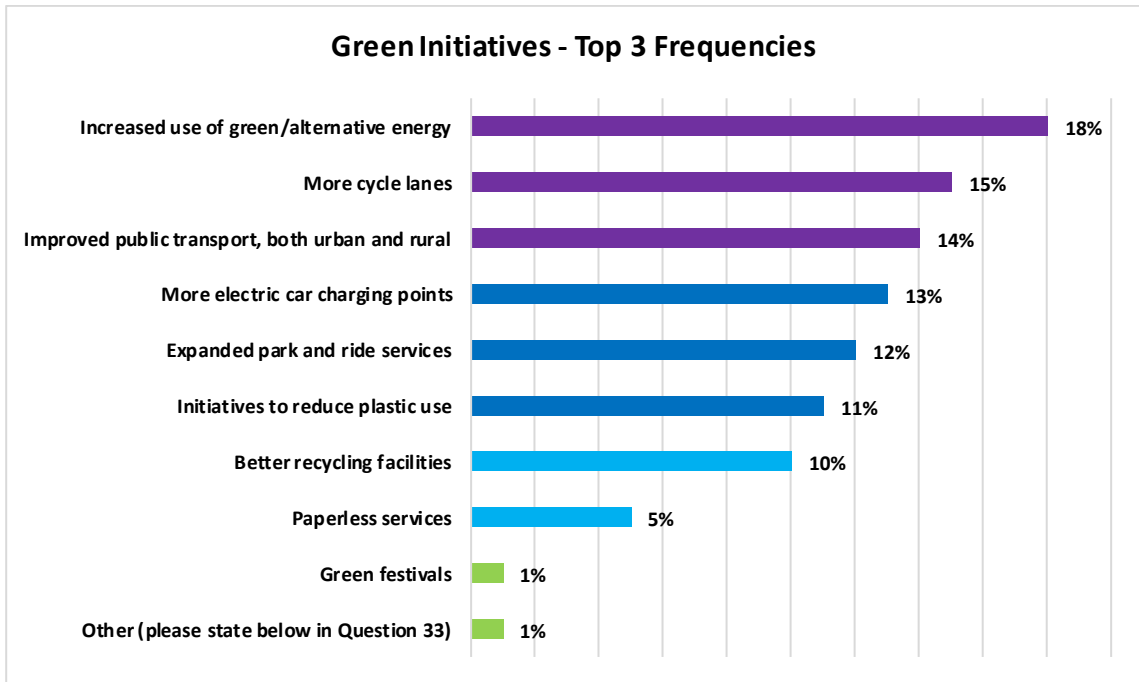
Figure 9-49: Green Initiatives
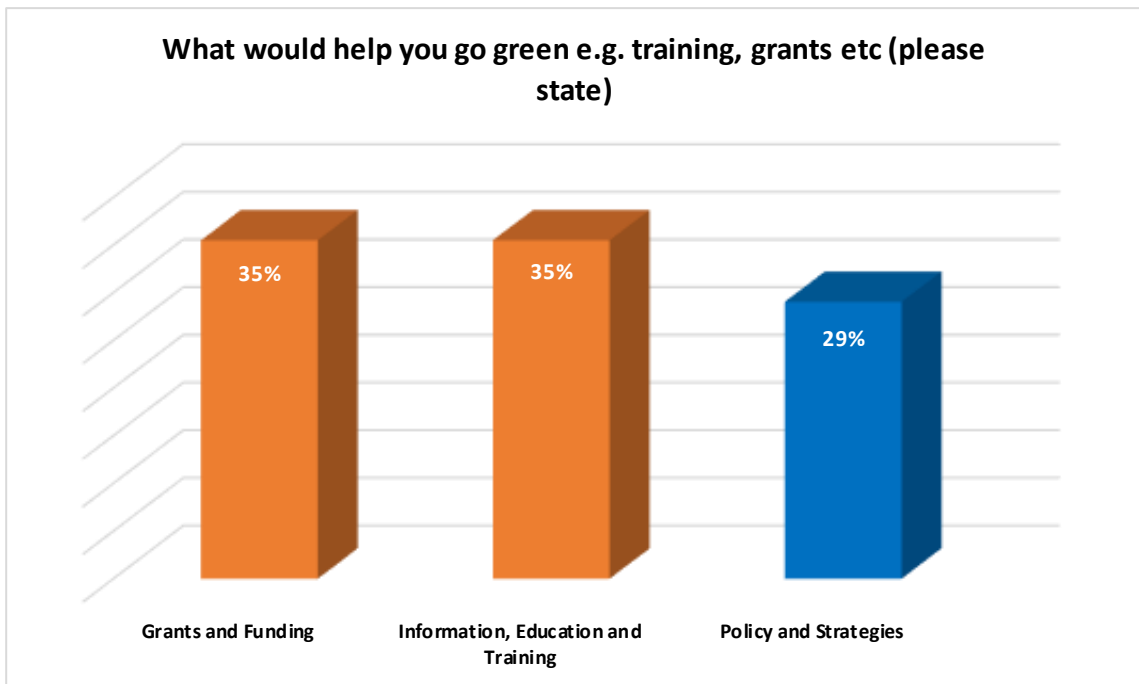
Figure 9-50: Help for businesses to go green
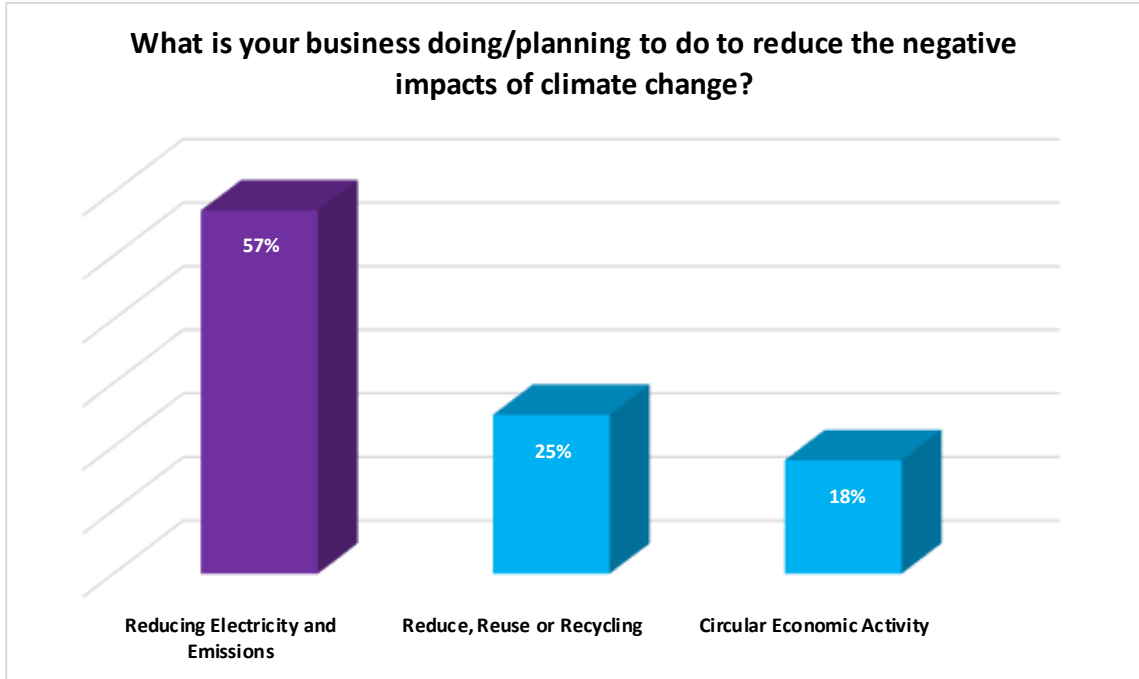
Figure 9-51: Business actions to reduce the negative impacts of climate change
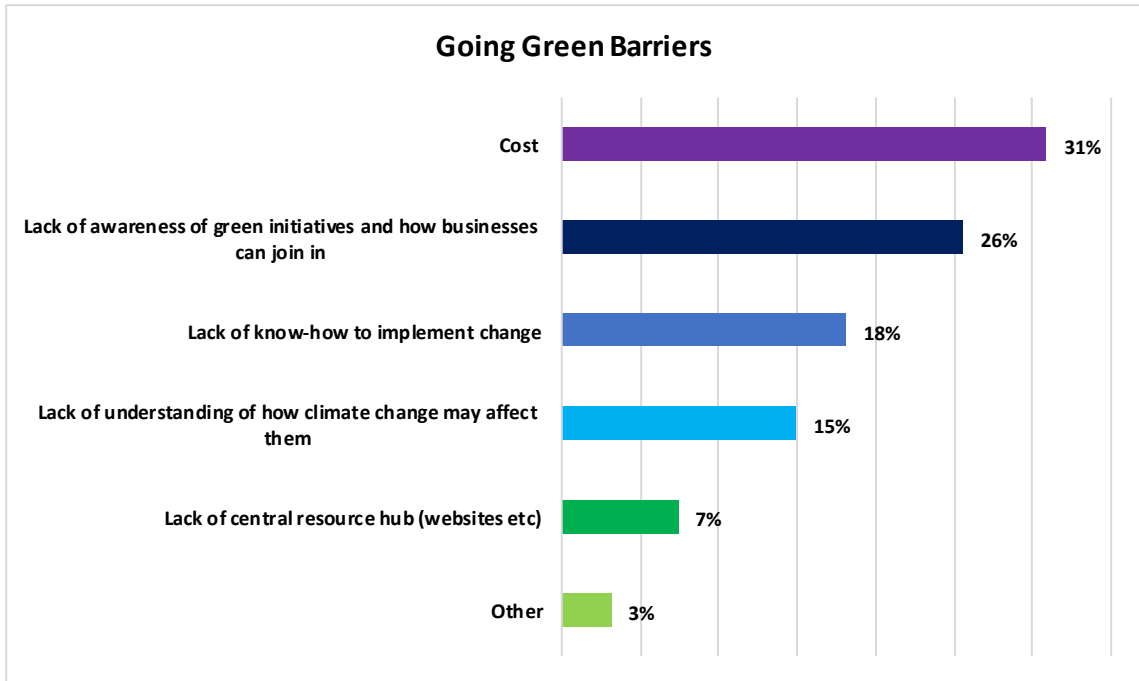
Figure 9-52: Going Green Barriers
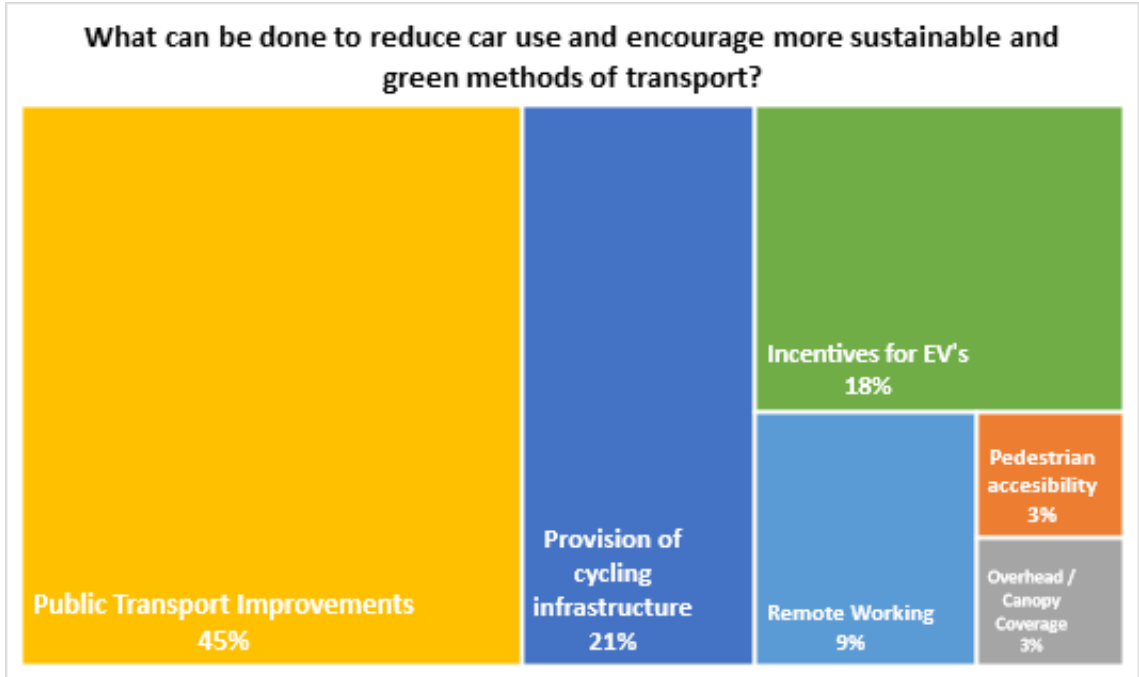
Figure 9-53: Actions to reduce car use and encourage more sustainable and green methods of transport
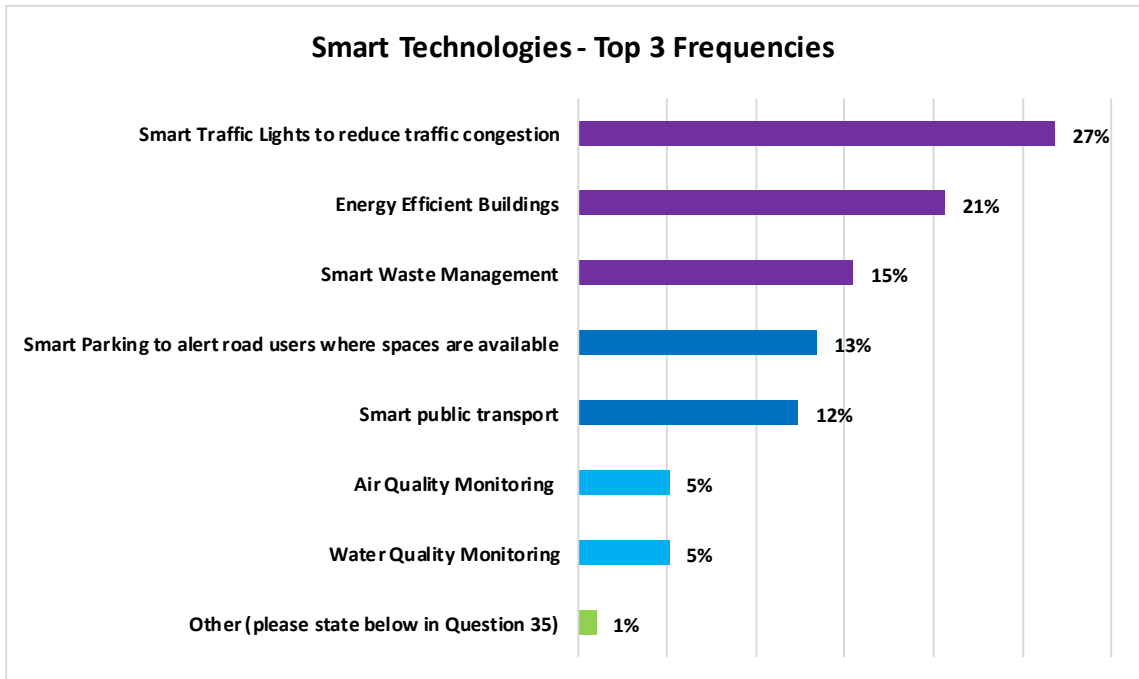
Figure 9-54: Smart Technologies
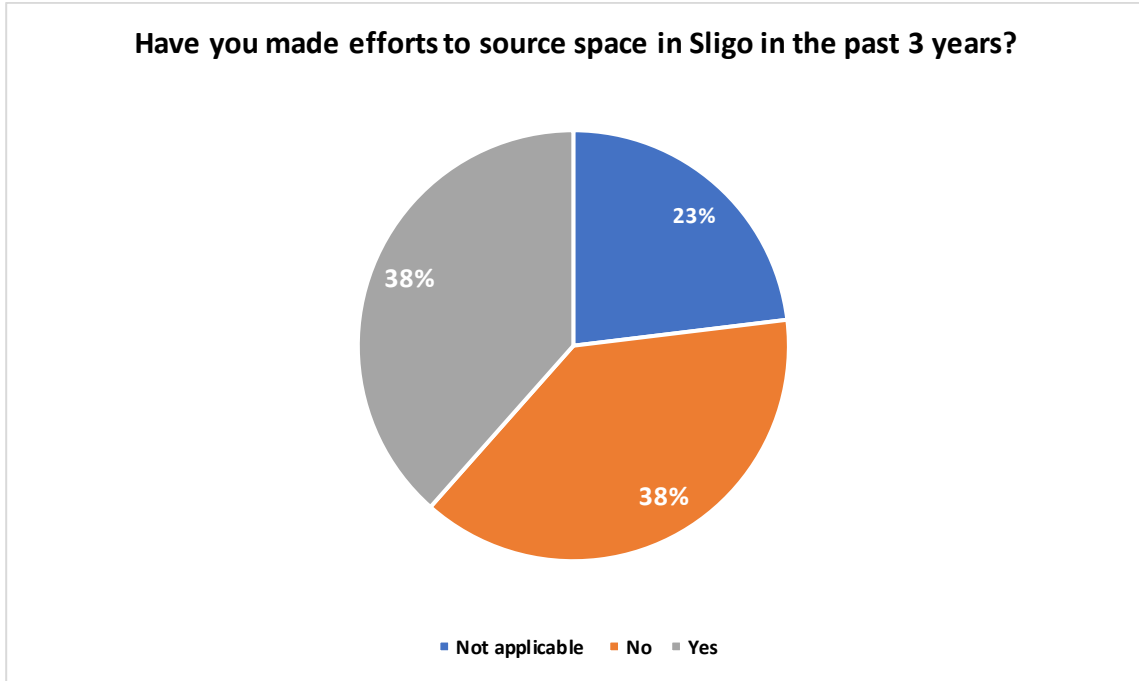
Figure 9-55: efforts to source space in Sligo in the past 3 years
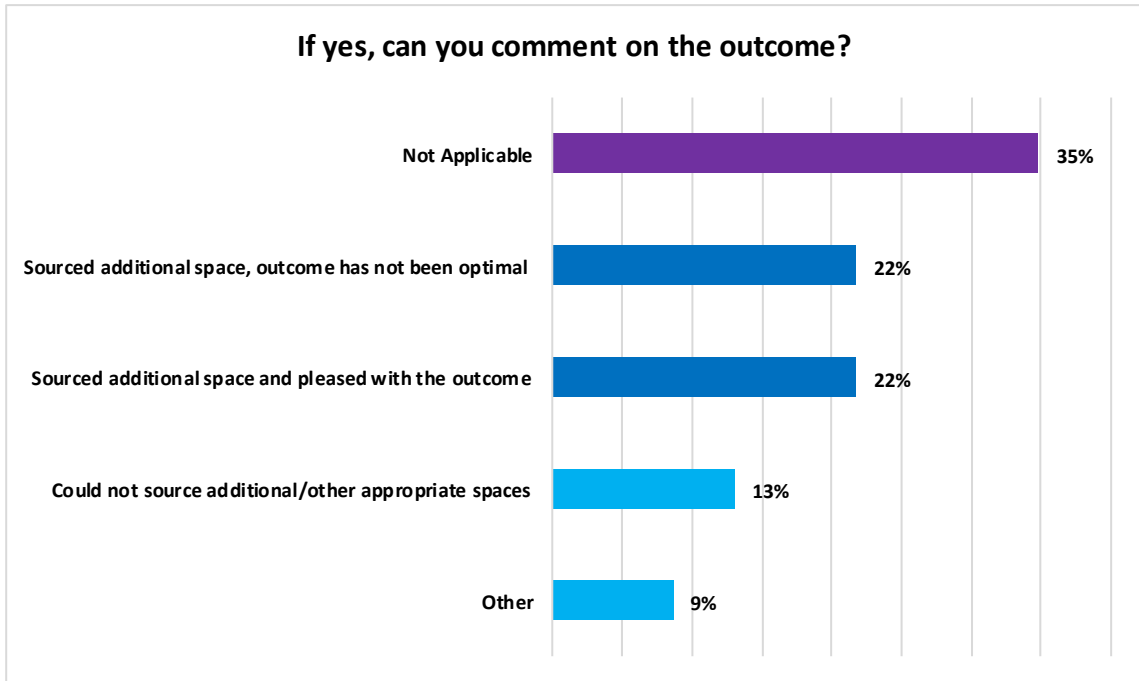
Figure 9-56: Comments on the outcome
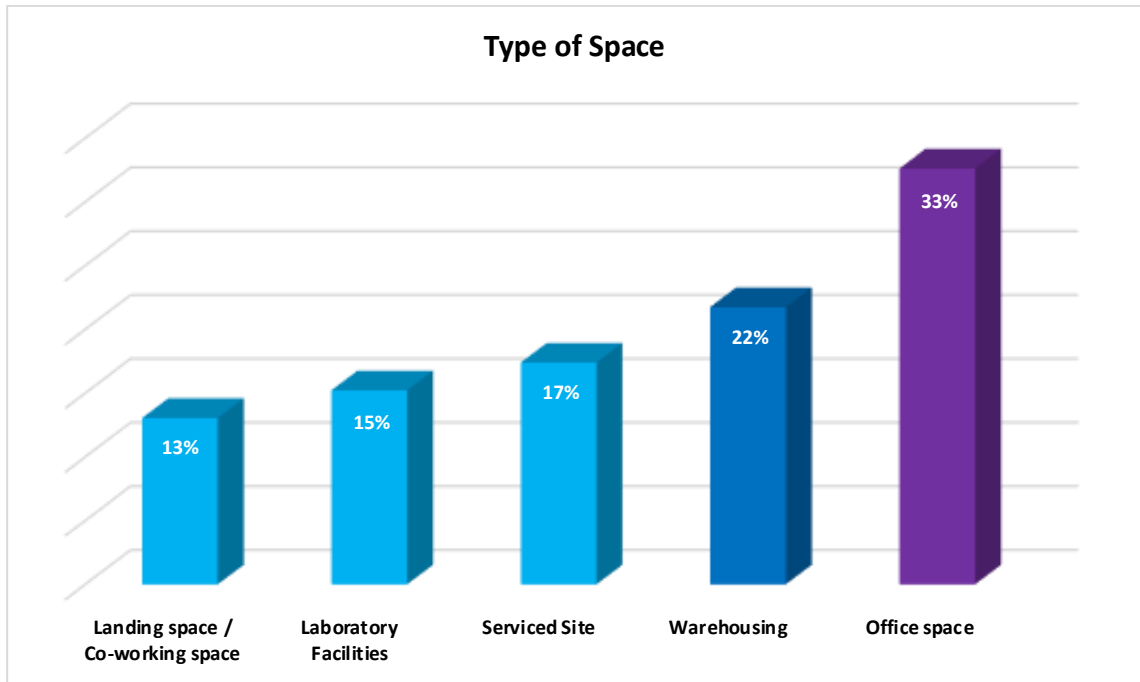
Type of Space

Figure 9-57: Type of Space
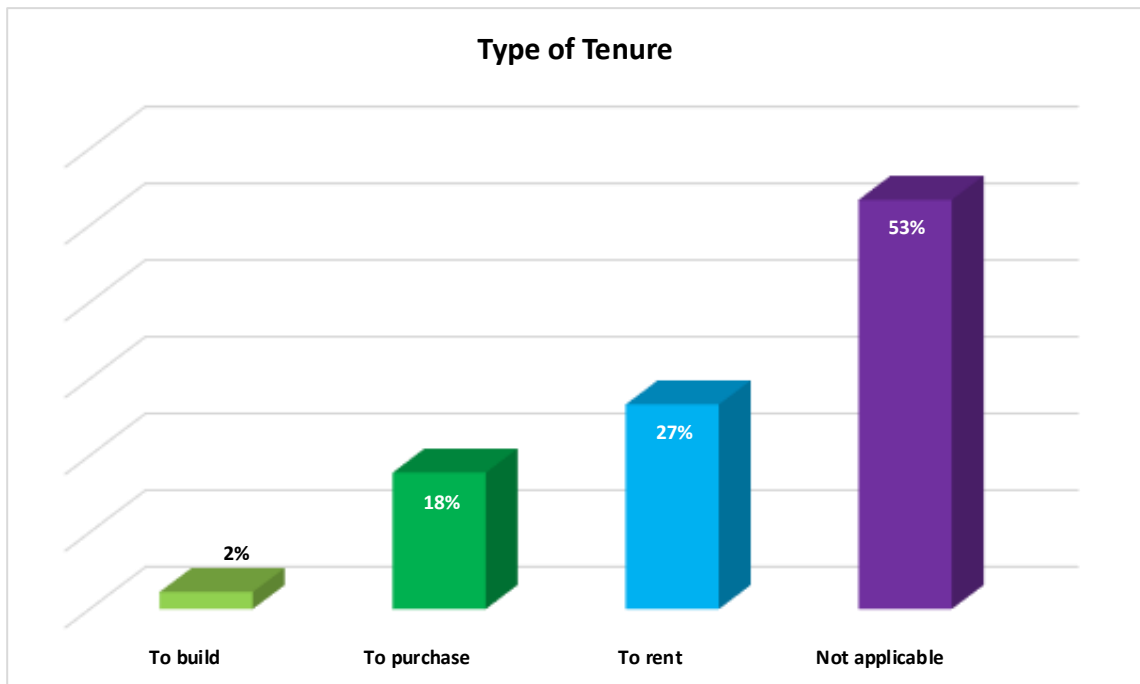
Type of Tenure

Figure 9-58: Type of Tenure

What is your own position on scaling-up, expanding or relocating your operations in the future?

We intend to scale up or expand our business, and we are likely to do so from our current location in Sligo.	43%
We do not foresee scaling up / expanding our business and do not expect to have demand for additional space in Sligo.	34%
We intend to scale up and expand our business, and we anticipate that this requires relocating to a different location in Sligo.	14%
We intend to scale up and expand our business, and we anticipate that we will need to establish an additional presence at a new location other than in Sligo.	9%

Figure 9-59: Position on scaling-up, expanding or relocating your operations in the future

Timeframe for scaling-up, expanding or relocating

Short term (<1 year)	Long-term (>3 years)	Not applicable	Medium-term (1-3 years)
3%	7%	21%	69%
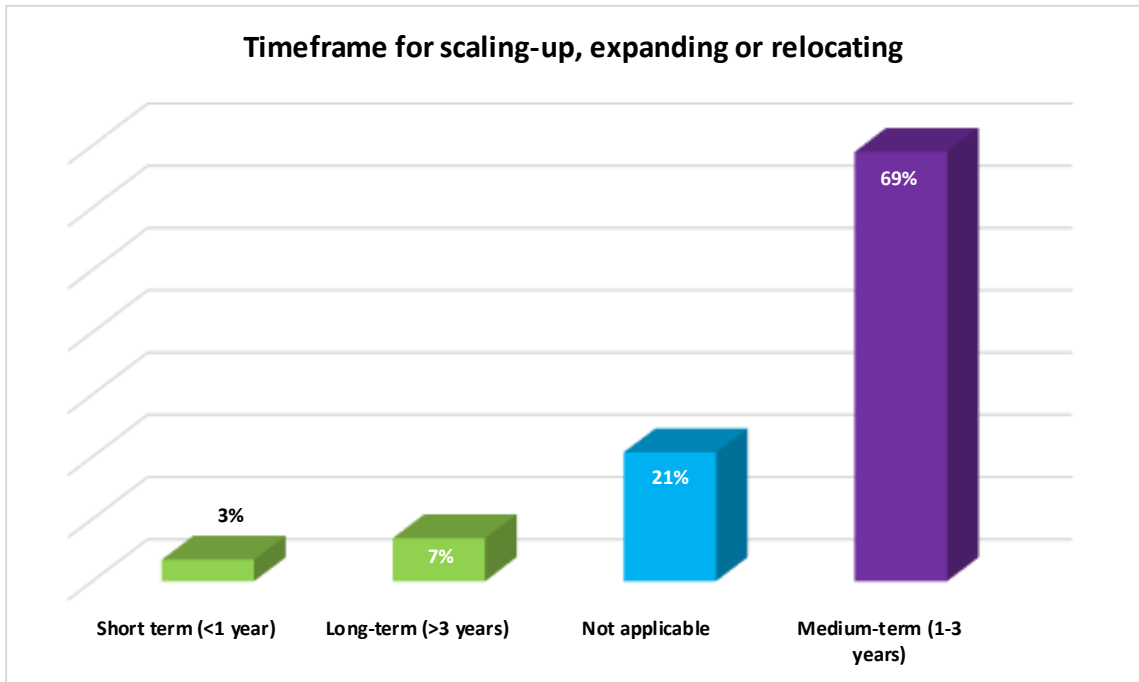
Figure 9-60: Timeframe for scaling-up, expanding or relocating
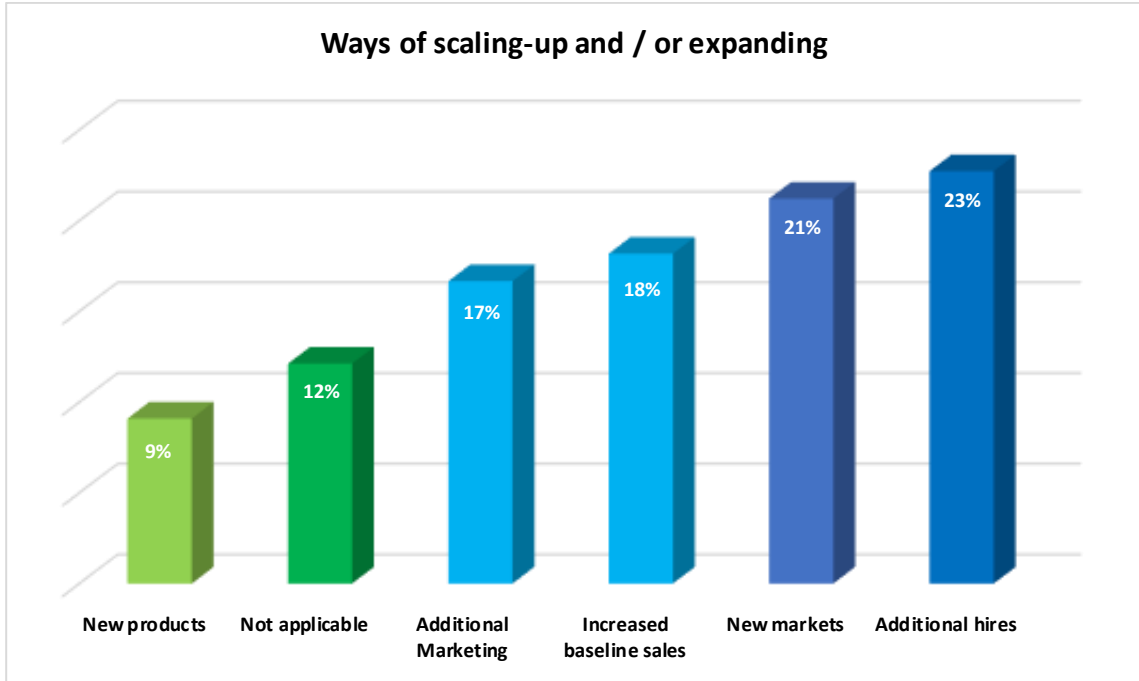
Figure 9-61: Ways of scaling-up and / or expanding
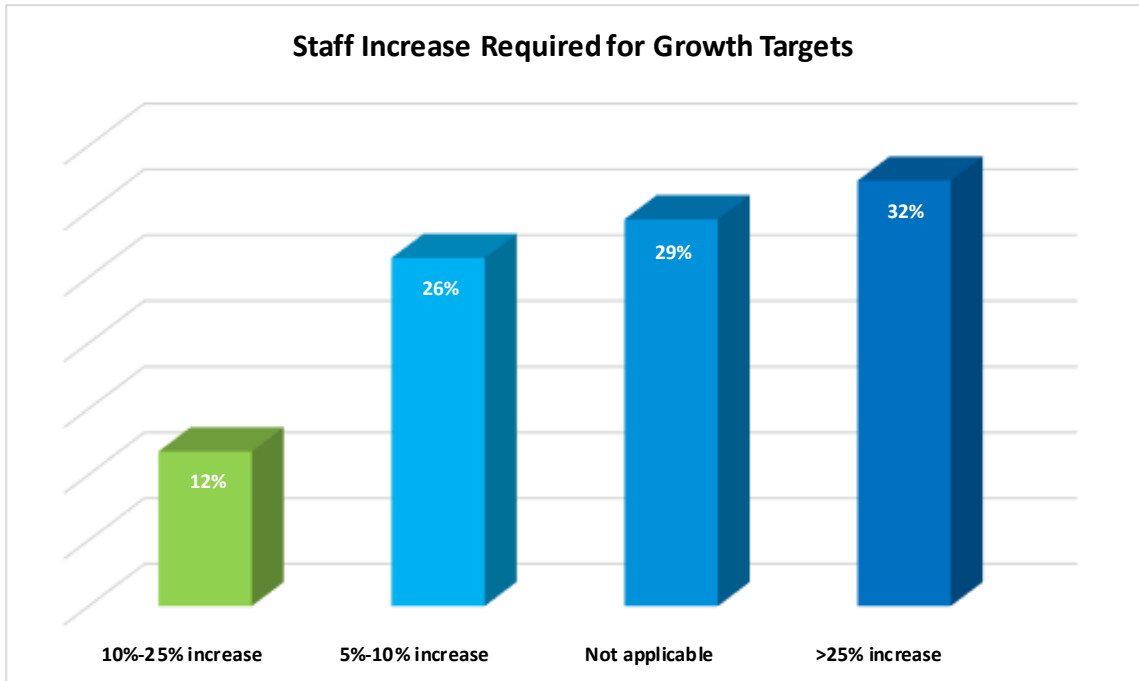
Figure 9-62: Staff Increase Required for Growth Targets
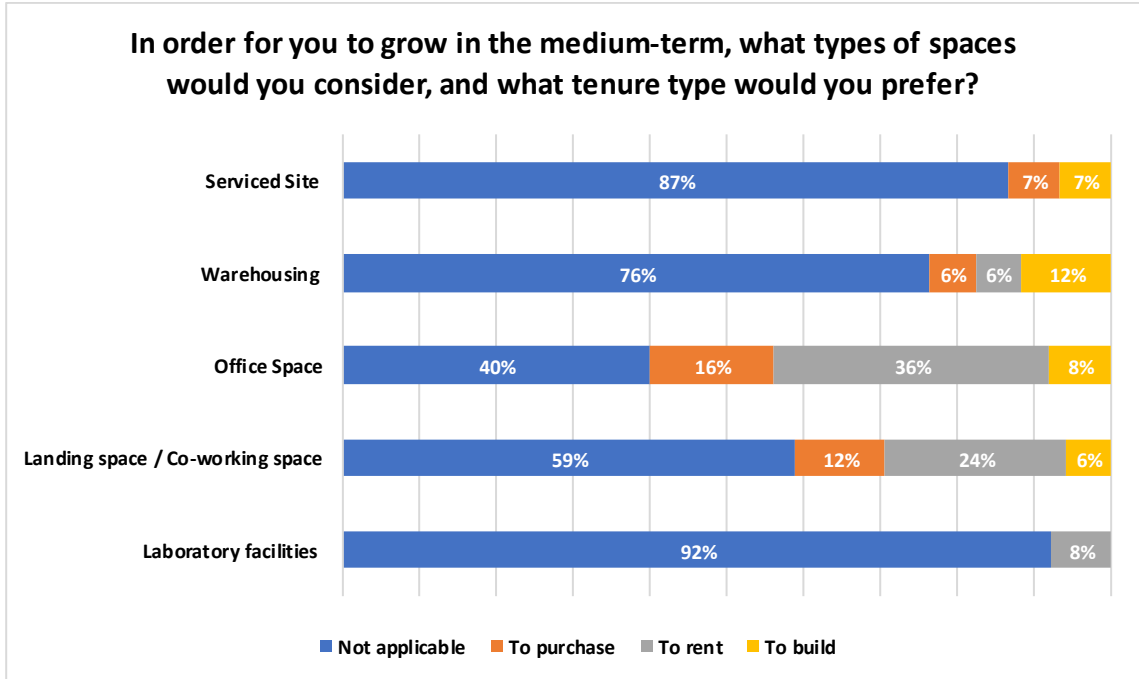
Figure 9-63: Types of spaces and tenure type preferred
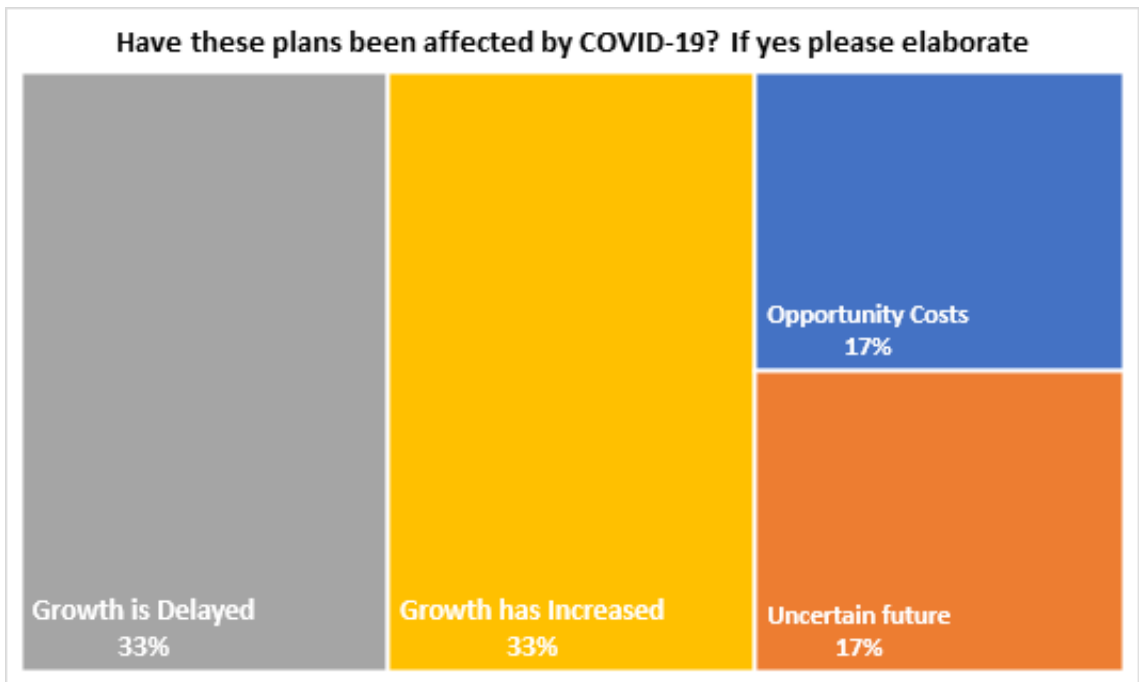
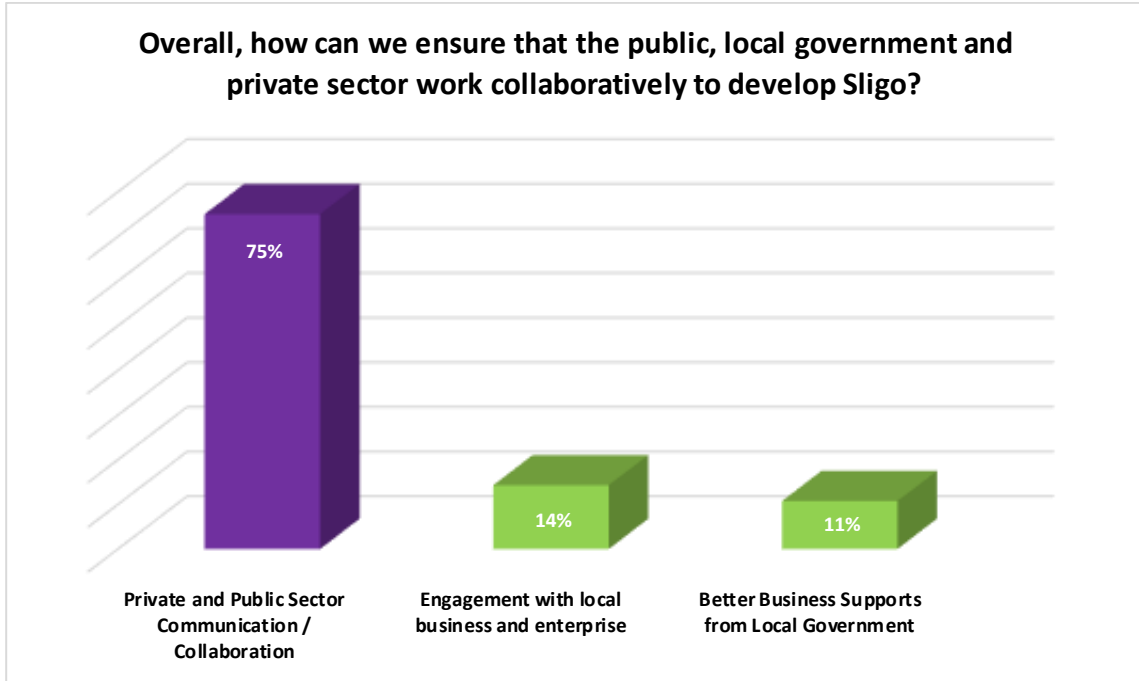Figure 9-64: Plans affected by COVID-19

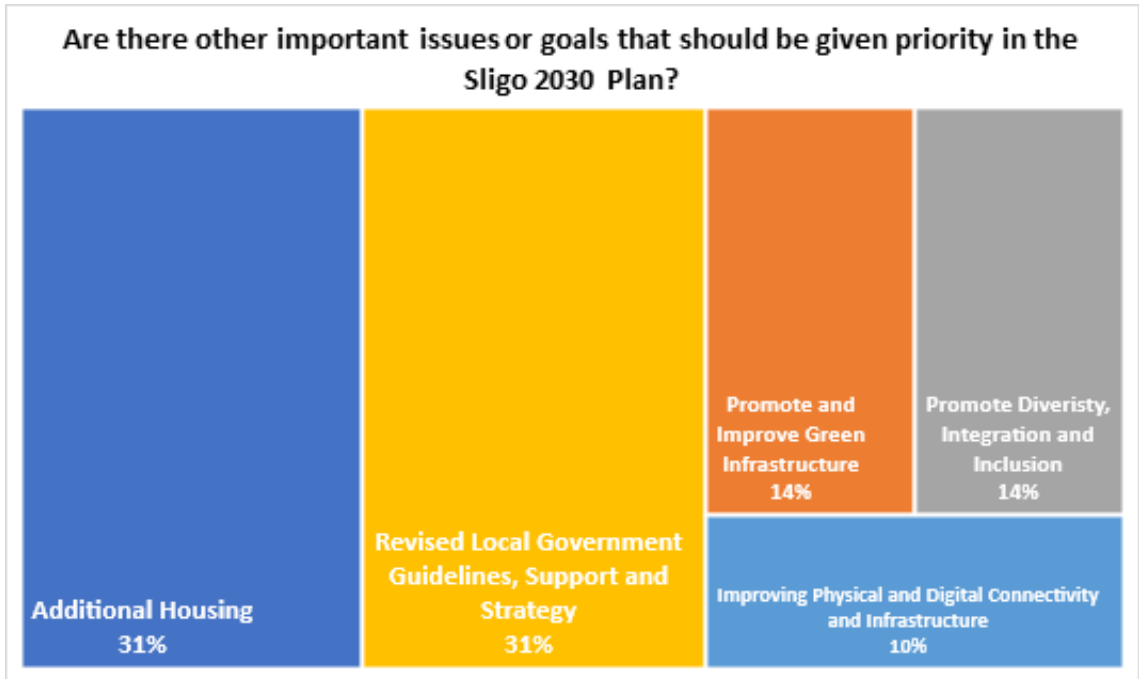Figure 9-65: Ways that Public, local government and private sector can collaborate to develop Sligo

Figure 9-66: Important issues or goals that should be given priority in the Sligo 2030 Plan

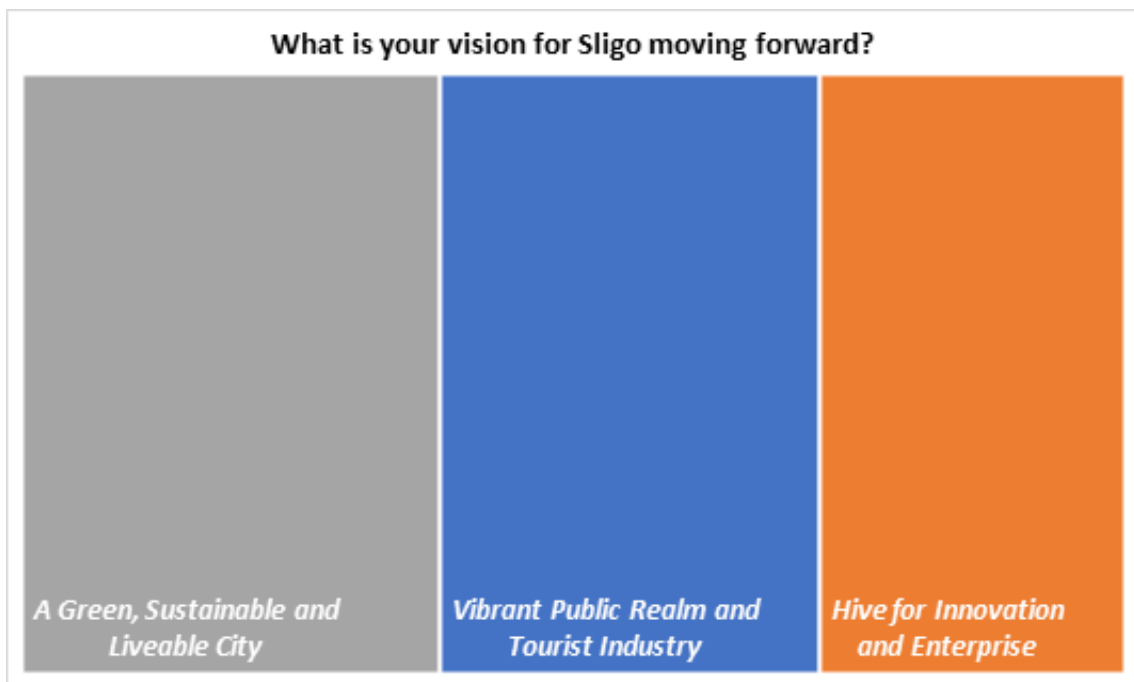Figure 9-67: Actions and objectives that will help to achieve these issues

Figure 9-68: vision for Sligo moving forward

APPENDIX B

10

SUMMARY OF KEY DATA SOURCES

10   Appendix B – Summary of Key Data Sources

Below is a summary list of key data sources used in the development of this socio-economic statement.

Name	Use Case	Data source	Website (if appropriate)
2016 and 2011 Census	Demographic Profile, Population Density, Population Change, Employment Profile, Households Profile etc.	Central Statistics Office	https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2016reports/census2016smallareapopulationstatistics/
Residential Indicators	Characteristics of Residential Property Purchasers 2010-2019	Central Statistics Office	https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2021/characteristicsofresidentialpropertypurchasers2010-2019/
	House Prices - Residential Property Price Index Breakdown	Central Statistics Office	https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-rppi/residentialpropertypriceindexseptember2021/
POWSCAR	Census 2016 Place of Work, School or College - Census of Anonymised Records (POWSCAR)	Central Statistics Office	n/a
Employment and unemployment	Labour Force Survey - Q2 2020	Central Statistics Office	https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurveylfsquarter22020/
	Live Register	Central Statistics Office	https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue
Transport	Transport infrastructure	Ordnance Survey Ireland	www.osi.ie
	Car registrations	Central Statistics Office	https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/vlftm/vehicleslicensedforthefirsttimejune2021/
Geodirectory	Resource identification	Client	n/a
	Housing Facilities, commercial properties	Client	n/a
	Vacant properties	Client	n/a
	Enterprises by category and traded cluster	Client	n/a
IDA	Distribution of registered IDA locations, Employment in IDA companies	IDA	n/a
Enterprise Ireland	Employment in EI Client Companies 2020	Enterprise Ireland	n/a

Pobal	Deprivation indices	Pobal	https://maps.pobal.ie/
Failte Ireland	Identify the main tourist locations	Fáilte Ireland	https://www.failteireland.ie/Research-Insights/Open-data.aspx
Heritage	Extract the main Heritage and Cultural sites	Heritage Council of Ireland	https://www.heritagemaps.ie/WebApps/HeritageMaps/index.html
	Architectural Conservation Area and assets of the Register of Protected Structures	Client	n/a
Social infrastructure	Medical Centres, Community Parks/Gardens	Open Street Maps	https://www.openstreetmap.ie/resources/data/
	Educational establishments	Open Street Maps	https://www.openstreetmap.ie/resources/data/
	Amenity and leisure assets	Open Street Maps	https://www.openstreetmap.ie/resources/data/
NPWS	Biodiversity boundaries for designated sites	National Parks and Wildlife Service	https://www.npws.ie/maps-and-data/designated-site-data
Sligo County Council	Completed and Proposed Developments for infrastructure and amenity	Client	n/a
	Listing of planned projects to enhance existing infrastructure	Client	n/a
	Commercial and residential planning pipeline	Client	n/a
	Digital services and infrastructure	Client	n/a
Sligo LEO	Identify Spaces which could be provided as working hubs	Client	n/a