

Retention in Irish Regions: Perspectives on the internal migration of Irish workers from rural regions

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Population Shrinkage

- The issue of shrinkage in the population of peripheral rural areas presents a significant challenge to policy makers interested in maintaining a balanced regional development.
- Often occurring simultaneously the fall in population levels results in reducing the existing pool of talented workers in a region.
- While some areas decline, others often absorb the skilled workers from these regions (Haartsen and Venhorst, 2010).
- Given this trend there is a need for planners and policy-makers to develop strategies of planning for shrinkage. Planners have been the largest contributors to this literature but, as noted by Franklin (2018) and Panagopoulos and Barreira (2012), the topic deserves more attention from economic geographers and economists as this issue is essentially about people.

Population Shrinkage

- While it is true that regional declines are usually associated with regional growth in other areas (Coleman and Rowthorn, 2011) in the Irish context significant regional imbalances have the potential to result in potential future growth through diseconomies as highlighted in Ireland 2040.
- There has been significant discussion on specific characteristics of location, employment opportunities, and quality of life as potential explanations of population shrinkage however this has received relatively little empirical attention (Hoekveld, 2012).
- Van Dam (2009) and Haartsen and Venhorst (2010) both highlight that the exact net impact and spatial consequences of population decline are hard to predict. The impacts are likely shaped by area specific characteristics such as the demography of those who remain in the region and the services available.

Population Shrinkage

- The 'circular description of shrinkage' (Hoekveld, 2012) describes a process whereby self-reinforcing factors result in not only an initial decline in a population but multiply this effect so that the region continues to decline.
- For instance, if a region suffers an 'economic shock' (although it does not need to be economic in nature) such as a major employer closing, this results in less employment opportunities, which results in outmigration of the working age population, which results in a decrease in total population, a decrease in birth rates, and a decrease in the labour pool.
- This then results in more business closures and a reduction of services within the region which results in more individuals migrating from the region.
- A propagating cycle of continual decline becomes cemented in the region.

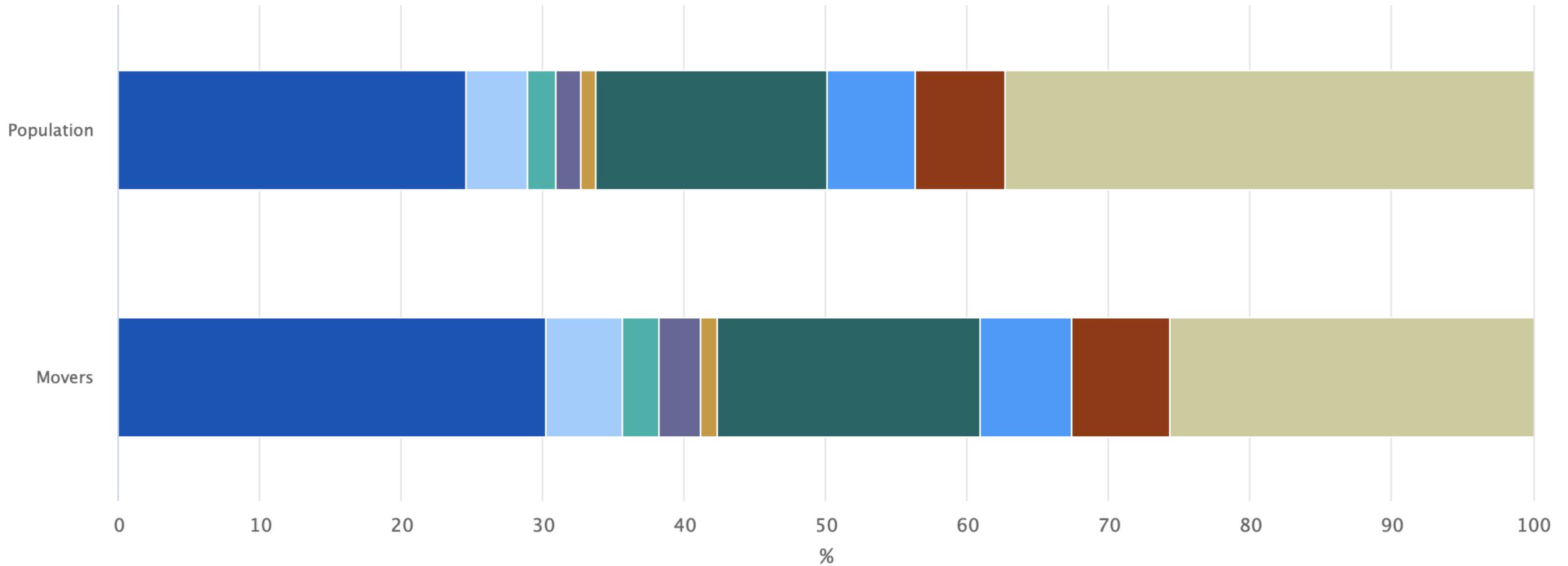
The Irish Context

- In the Irish context this process has been occurring in rural regions for decades (Cawley, 1994).
- Between the Censuses of 1911 and 2011, the population of County Dublin has increased by 332%, well above the state average increase in population of 46%.
- In contrast, nine counties, primarily in Connaught and Ulster experienced population decreases.
- The average gross domestic product and gross value added per person in Border and Western counties is less than a third of that of the capital city (CSO, 2018).
- 57 per cent of the growth in jobs between 2015 and 2018 has been in the greater Dublin region (CSO, 2019). Further, between the censuses of 2011 and 2016, the population of Dublin and its commuter belt have grown at the fastest pace.

The Irish Context

- Project Ireland 2040 projects a population increase of 1 million people in Ireland over the next two decades with 50% of this increase expected to be in regional towns and in rural areas.
- A central objective of Ireland 2040 is to plan for and implement a better distribution of regional growth, in terms of jobs and prosperity.
- However, the context is still one of regional decline in Ireland.
- Such regional and place disparities have also been identified internationally, where skilled people in lagging regions have been out-migrating, leading to a vicious circle of population and talent loss that is creating spatial traps for those who remain, growing regional economic divides and growing geographies of discontent (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose and Storper, 2018).

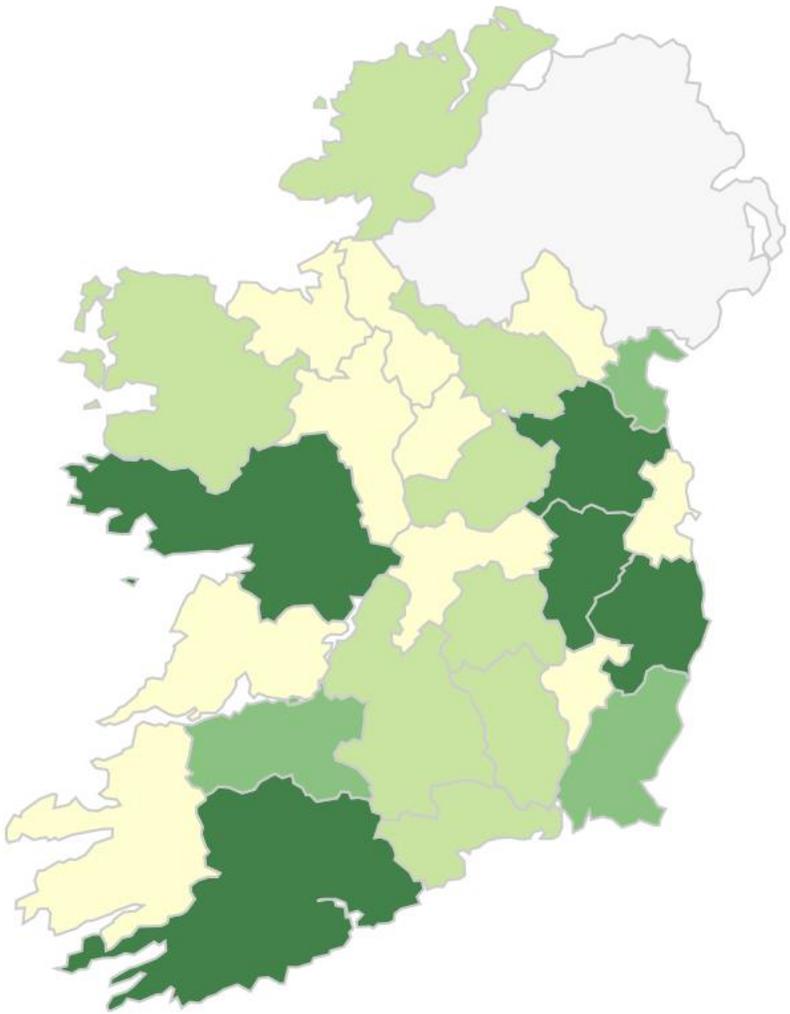
The Irish Context – Population April 2016



- Rural
- Towns 1,500 to 4,999
- Towns 5,000 to 9,999
- Towns 10,000 or over
- Waterford city and suburbs
- Galway city and suburbs
- Limerick city and suburbs
- Cork city and suburbs
- Dublin city and suburbs

Source: CSO (2018)

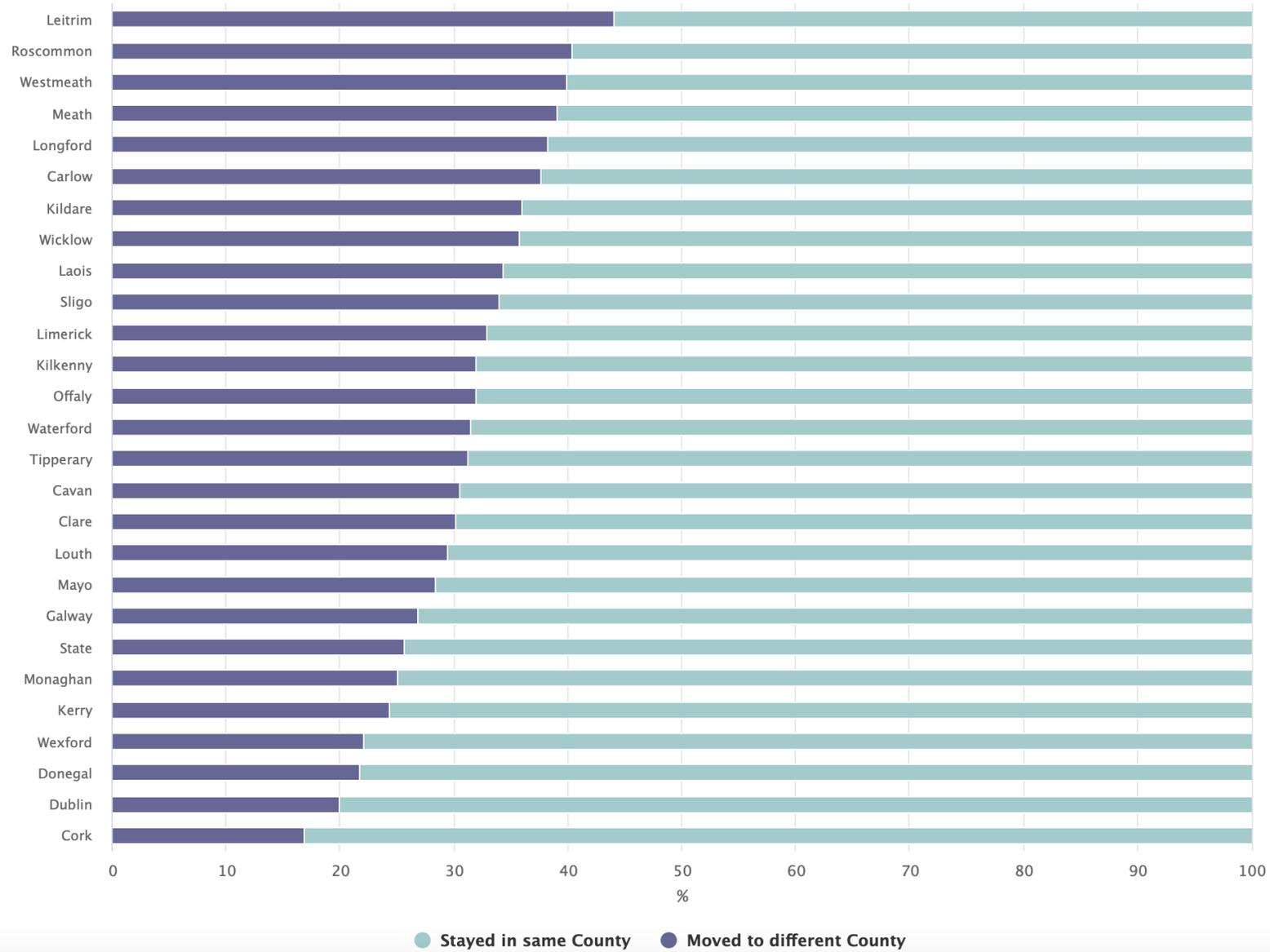
The Irish Context – Where do people go if they leave Dublin?



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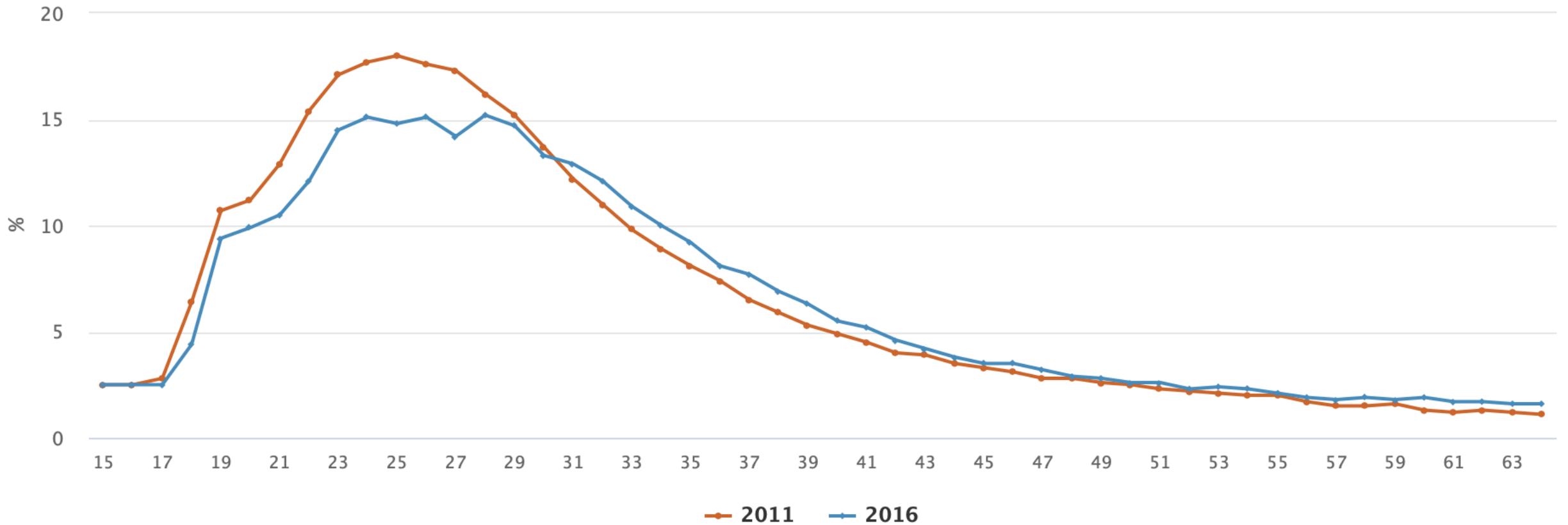
Source: CSO (2018)

The Irish Context – Where are people leaving?

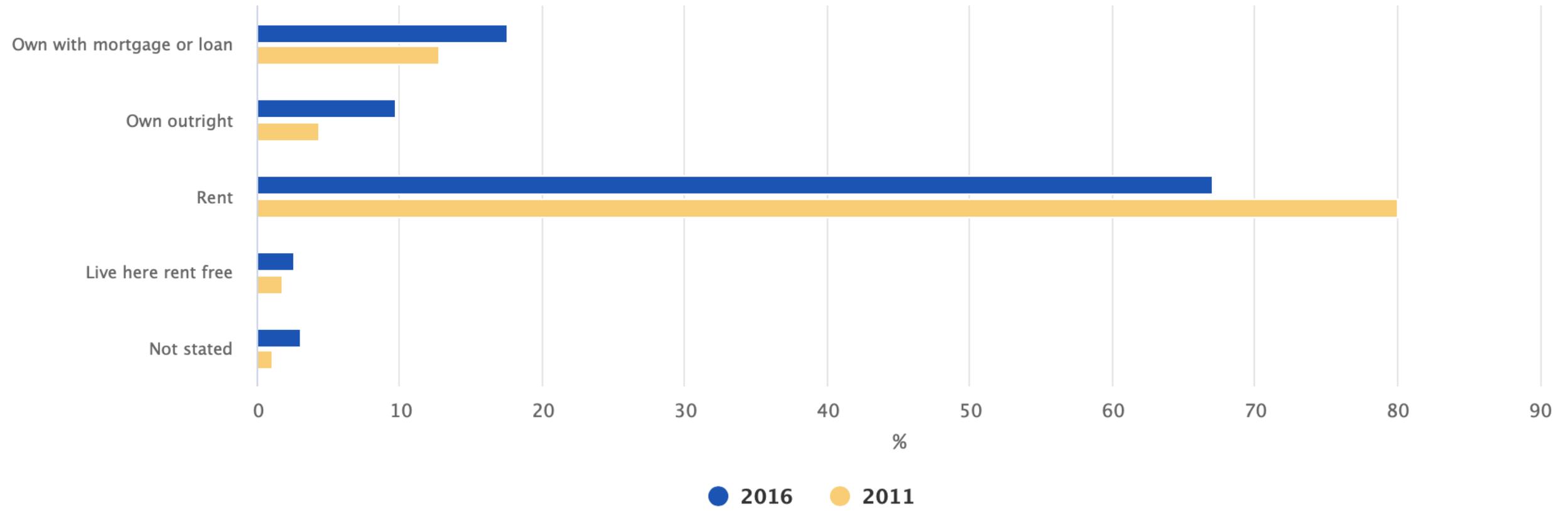


Source: CSO (2018)

The Irish Context – Who is moving?



The Irish Context – Who is moving (by occupancy type)?



An example of countering this trend

- The Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen, Co. Cork is located in the periphery of the South West of Ireland.
- The initiative aims to:
 - facilitate up to 75 people in a creative co-working environment
 - a long term objective to facilitate 500 direct jobs and 1000 indirect jobs via a sustainable digital economy for Skibbereen and the wider West Cork area.
- The Hub has resulted in the generation of €4 million per annum for the local economy and attracted national & international start ups.

An example of countering this trend

- Offers attractive standard of living.
- Accommodation prices in the local area are relatively modest (€500 per month average) in comparison with Dublin (€2,500 per month average for a small apartment or 1-2 bed house) and Cork City (€1,200 per month average for a small apartment or 1-2 bed house).
- Strong presence of educational institutions for primary and secondary education in Skibbereen.
- 50 minutes drive from nearest airport.
- Active social life, entrenched in history, high-quality food scene, significant tourist attractions.

Conclusions

- Creative solutions needed to address the loss of talent from regions.
- Ireland is investing in developing some hubs in an attempt to address regional decline.
- However, experience of some Irish regions is that it is necessary for the infrastructure to be in place for this to succeed.
- Skibbereen for instance benefited from the installation of high speed broadband.