

Symposium: The Role of Planning in Ensuring Housing Supply

Applied Intelligence through Census Insight: Forward Planning and Delivering Sustainable Communities

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1. INTRODUCTION

The July 2024 publication of Ireland's Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework (NPF) is reflective of the scale of wider change occurring across Ireland's planning system in recent years. It comes on the foot of a convergence of factors, not least the publication of Census 2022 results (throughout 2023 in the main) providing a recent snapshot of Irish demographics, the publication of the work by The Housing Commission,¹ and the awaited introduction of the Planning and Development Bill, 2023. There have been many other policy interventions across themes such as housing demand assessment, development management and density guidance at a national level combined with often new provisions in statutory City/County Development Plans, the culmination of which has often brought uncertainty, conflict and the challenge of apparent competing priorities.

The Bill itself represents a new legislative framework for proper spatial planning and sustainable development across local, regional and national scales, and seeks to provide a planning system that can deliver critical infrastructure while protecting and enhancing natural assets and amenities and improve the quality of the environment. As of July 2024, the Bill has been heralded and criticised in equal measure by industry practitioners, political commentators and other interested parties.

The revisions to the NPF ultimately sets out the strategic framework to ensure that Ireland's growth and development is plan-led, and to balance often competing priorities across environmental protection, social and economic development. Upon publication, Minister O'Brien described the context:

*"The world has changed significantly since the NPF was first published in 2018, and we must ensure our national planning strategy is appropriate for our current and future needs. These changes need to be reflected in the NPF as they impact on how we plan for the country's growth and development, particularly in relation to our growing and changing population and our climate action commitments."*²

This paper explores some of the insights gleaned through Census 2022 data, their application in informing planning and development decision-making, plans and projects in Ireland, and reaffirms the need for evidence to underpin forward planning and the realisation of sustainable communities. Data of itself is just information, yet the collation, structuring, interrogation and analysis of data can glean important insight and trends from which more informed decision making can be realised.

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¹ [Link to the Report of The Housing Commission \(2024\)](#)

² Press Release for the publication, for a period of public consultation, on 10 July of the Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework; [gov - Draft Revision of National Planning Framework open for public consultation \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

As a case in point on where data-led insight can directly influence forward planning (or indeed revitalisation of a local area), the paper considers the principles and application of the “15 minute city” (or indeed “15 minute neighbourhood”), a planning concept that has come into sharp focus in recent years not least through societal experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, and reflections on the importance placed on “community”, “accessibility” and our interaction with community, sporting, social and cultural infrastructure locally. The “15-minute city” is a concept that promotes a sustainable neighbourhood where the community has an easy level of access to their essential day-to-day needs like food and groceries, leisure, sport and recreation, healthcare and education within 15 minutes’ walk from their home (which is the focal point of these amenities and services).

2. CENSUS 2022

Census 2022 recorded a landmark moment in Ireland’s demographic history, marking “the first time in 171 years that Ireland’s population exceeded the five million threshold”.³ While this makes a striking headline, it provides only the simplest reflection of the State’s rapidly changing population.

The data demonstrates how the changes to Ireland’s housing stock have not matched the evolution of its population. That inertia has contributed to the State’s increasingly critical housing problems. However, this new data gives us the power to improve our expectations for future housing need, helping us to determine the number, type, and location of homes required across Ireland.

2.1 Census 2022: How has Ireland’s demography changed?

Looking beyond the high-level totals, it is clear that the Irish population is becoming more diverse, with 53% of the State’s 8.1% annual population growth since 2016 coming from net migration. If not for the COVID-19 pandemic restricting international movement, it is likely this figure would have been higher still.

Ireland’s population is also longer-lived and has more complex needs than ever before. The cohort of people aged over 65 has risen 22% in just 6 years, while new entrants to younger age cohorts are in decline. The structure of our population for the next 50 years is already taking shape. This has implications for how we plan for and deliver housing at a national level. Demographic shift means the types of homes Ireland demands is changing.

Census 2022 provides insight into where and how we live, showing falls in the number of owner occupiers at the expense of renters, particularly social renters. Notably, Ireland has experienced only marginal changes in average household size, from 2.75 in 2016 to 2.74 in 2022, representing a slowdown in the longer-term trend of decreasing households. This reinforces the impact of the residential supply constraint we see all around us.

2.2 Why is any of this demographic change a surprise?

Like Cassandra of Troy, many demographers may have felt fated to be ignored as they prophesied these shifts as far back as Census 2016. The difference in 2024 is that now we have the hard evidence to back up these projections. This is an exceptionally important foundation in a planning regime where decisions made now can have impacts decades into the future.

Beyond simply confirming the extent of these demographic shifts, Census 2022 also opens the door to new analytical dimensions. Take, for example, the components of population growth: natural increase versus net migration. As reflected in Table 1 and Figure 1, across the country we observe that the natural increase in population between 2016 and 2022 was concentrated within and immediately surrounding Dublin (particularly Fingal, Meath, Westmeath and Kildare) and Galway, with secondary concentrations around Cork and in the South East. This reflects households having children in situ, but also cases where couples may have moved out to the suburbs and beyond before starting a family, possibly catalysed due to the rise in work flexibility we saw through the pandemic.

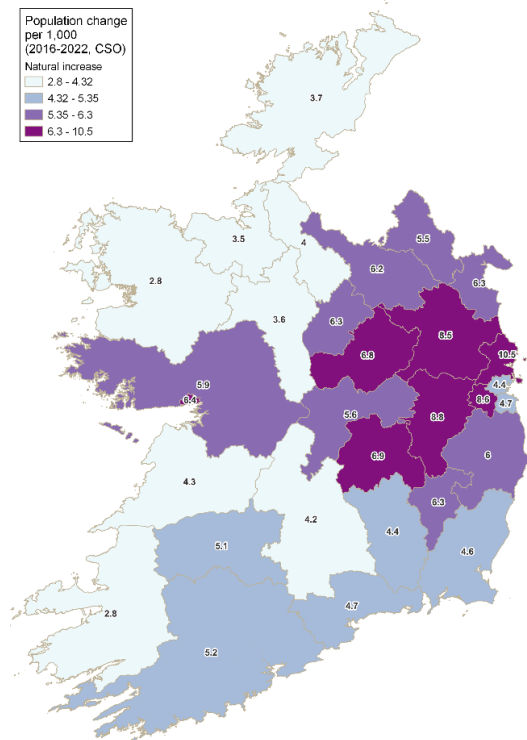
³<https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2023pressreleases/pressstatementcensusofpopulation2022-summaryresults>

Table 1: Components of population change per 1,000 people. 2016-2022 (CSO)

County	Region	Total increase per 1,000 people	Natural increase per 1,000 people	Net migration per 1,000 people
Longford	Midlands	22.6	6.3	16.8
Meath	Eastern	20.9	8.5	12.9
Fingal	Dublin	18.5	10.5	8.4
Kildare	Eastern	18.1	8.8	9.7
Leitrim	Border	15.8	4	12
Waterford City and County	Southeast	15.4	4.7	11
Wexford	Southeast	15.2	4.6	10.8
Wicklow	Eastern	15.1	6	9.4
Carlow	Southeast	14.2	6.3	8.1
Roscommon	West	14.2	3.6	10.8
Laois	Midlands	13.7	6.9	7
Louth	Eastern	13.5	6.3	7.4
Westmeath	Midlands	13.5	6.8	7
South Dublin	Dublin	12.9	8.6	4.5
Galway County	West	12.5	5.9	6.9
Clare	Midwest	12.4	4.3	8.3
Cork City and Cork County	Southwest	12.3	5.2	7.3
Limerick City and County	Midwest	12.1	5.1	7.2
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	Dublin	11.8	4.7	7.2
Galway City	West	11.8	6.4	5.6
Cavan	Border	11.7	6.2	5.7
Sligo	Border	11.5	3.5	8.2
Dublin City	Dublin	11.2	4.4	6.9
Offaly	Midlands	10.8	5.6	5.3
Monaghan	Border	10.3	5.5	5
Kerry	Southwest	9.6	2.8	7
Mayo	West	9.3	2.8	6.6
Tipperary	Midwest	8.5	4.2	4.4
Donegal	Border	8.1	3.7	4.5
Kilkenny	Southeast	8.1	4.4	3.8

Source: https://ws.cso.ie/public/api.restful/PxStat.Data.Cube_API.ReadDataset/FY104/XLSX/2007/en

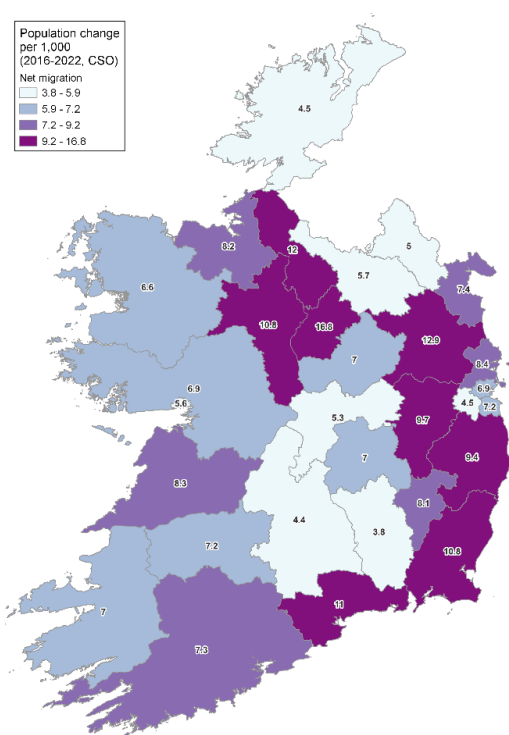
Figure 1: Natural increase per 1,000 people. 2016-2022 (CSO)



Source: Map produced by KPMG Future Analytics drawing on https://ws.cso.ie/public/api.restful/PxStat.Data.Cube_API.ReadDataset/FY104/XLSX/2007/en

The pattern for population growth attributable to net migration between 2016 and 2022 differs substantially, as indicated in Table 1 and Figure 2. Population growth due to migration, whether “relocation”, “returning” or “New Irish” has largely occurred in the South East (particularly Waterford and Wexford), in the counties surrounding Dublin, and in the north of the Midlands, with secondary patterns of growth in Limerick and Cork.

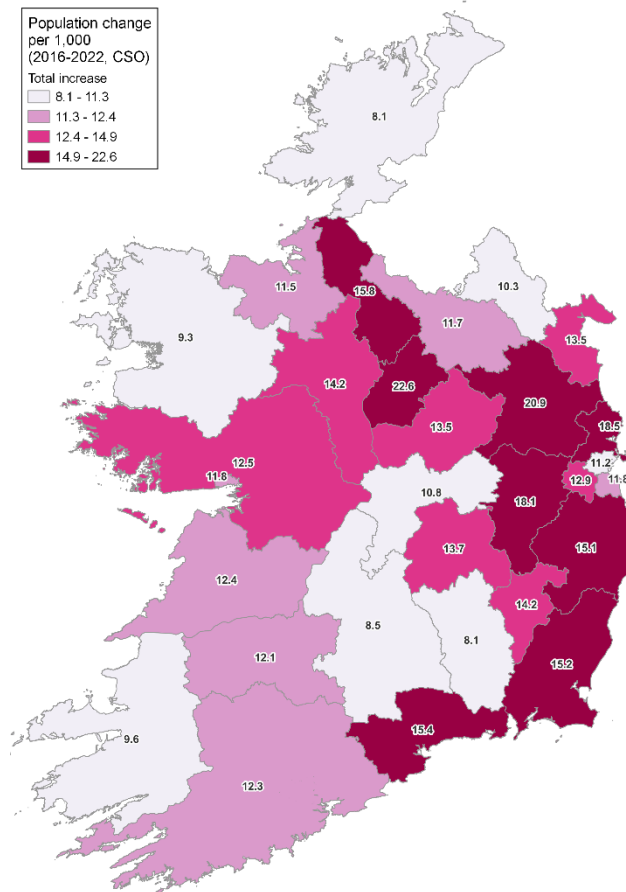
Figure 2: Net migration per 1,000 people. 2016-2022 (CSO)



Source: Map produced by KPMG Future Analytics drawing on https://ws.cso.ie/public/api.restful/PxStat.Data.Cube_API.ReadDataset/FY104/XLSX/2007/en

As reflected in Table 1 and Figure 3, the blended picture, combining both natural increase and migration, misses this distinction. While the Greater Dublin Area and the South East are clearly areas of strong population increase across both sources, locations with high rates of natural increase and associated demographic characteristics, such as Laois, Offaly and Leinster outside of the Greater Dublin Area.

Figure 3: Total population increase per 1,000 people. 2016-2022 (CSO)



Source: Map produced by KPMG Future Analytics drawing on https://ws.cso.ie/public/api.restful/PxStat.Data.Cube_API.ReadDataset/FY104/XLSX/2007/en

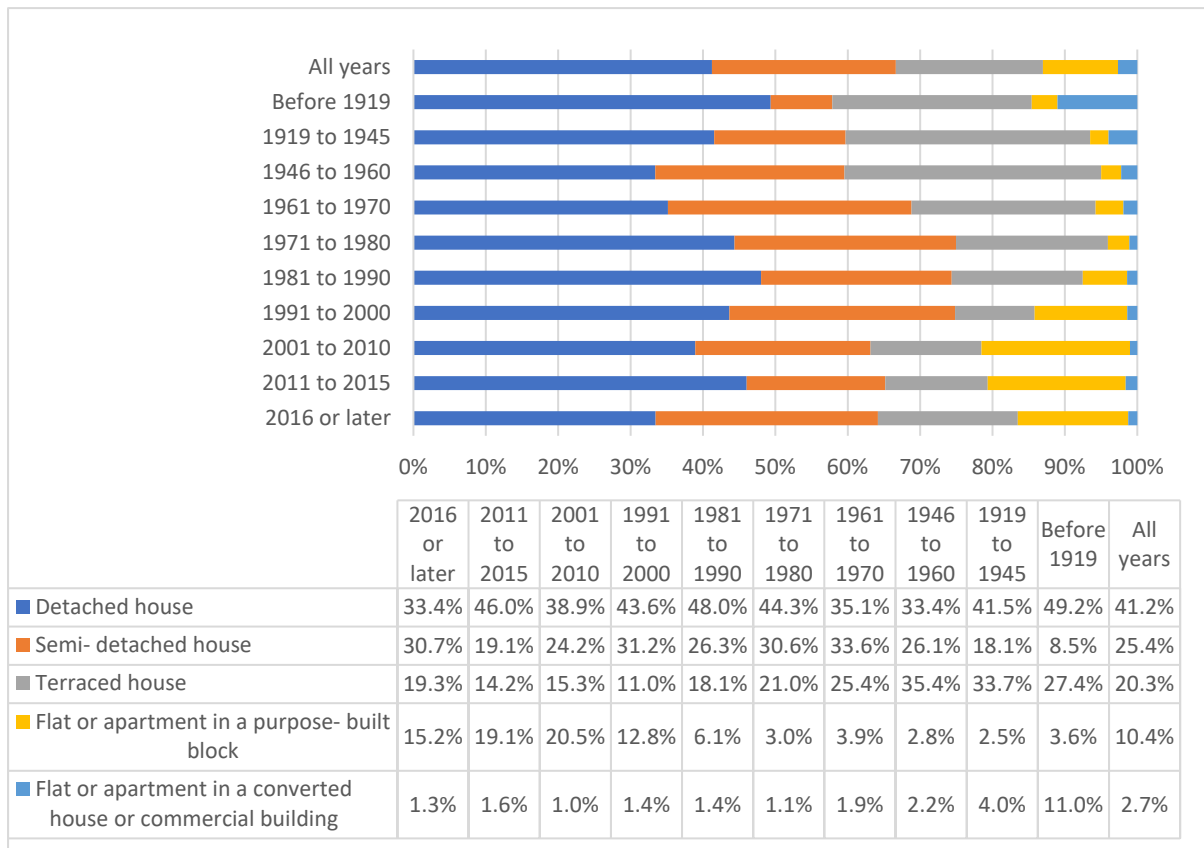
These maps show patterns of historical growth but also indicatively plot out where future demand generation (due the future natural increase) is likely to be concentrated across the coming generations. When compared to other areas for which information is available through Census 2022, we can use this to transform data into insights.

2.3 Housing stock composition and distribution

Taking just one example area, new Census data confirms what previously we had been forced to assume about the composition of housing stock across the State, as illustrated in Figure 4. Over the past century, we have known that a rising proportion of housing delivery comprised apartments, especially since the 1980s. We can now see that this trend has begun to reverse, with apartments making a shrinking total share of all constructed dwellings, declining from approximately 19% between 2011-2015 to 15% in the most recent period. This has implications for the way we determine the appropriate mix of homes in new communities and how we deliver a range of housing typologies to reflect the spectrum of people's housing needs.

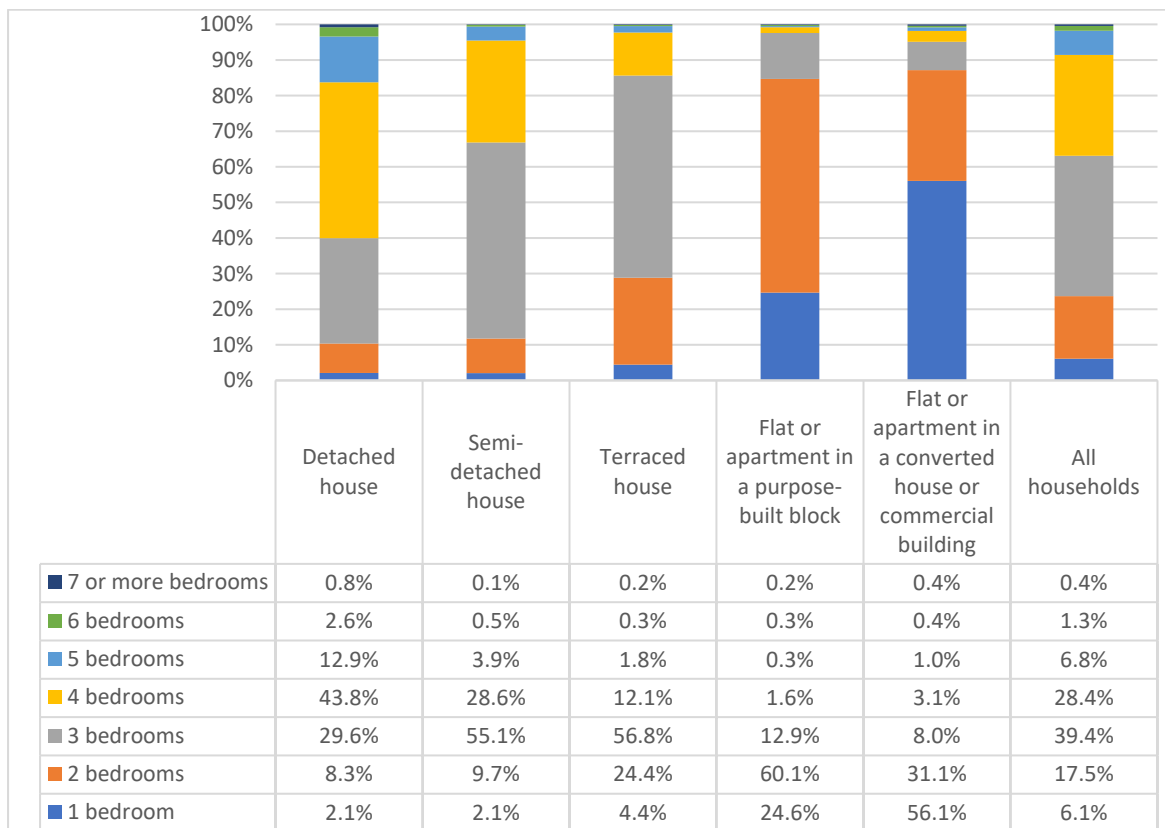
With Census 2022, we can now add insight on bedroom numbers to this analysis of housing types, using the recorded age of stock as a broad proxy for delivery of different dwelling sizes. In Figure 5 we see that smaller homes, with one or two bedrooms, make up the overwhelming majority of apartments in the State. More than 85% of flats, whether purpose-built or converted from existing stock, have 1 and 2 bedrooms, compared to less than 30% of terraced houses and only around 12% of semi-detached houses, which make up over two thirds of units delivered in the last 8 years.

Figure 4: Households by dwelling type and period in which dwelling was built. 2022 (CSO)



Source: <https://data.cso.ie/table/FY033A>

Figure 5: Households by dwelling type and number of bedrooms. 2022 (CSO)



Source: <https://data.cso.ie/table/F2063>

Geographically, the results of Census 2022 also display an uneven distribution of supply by number of bedrooms across the country as illustrated in Table 2 and in Figures 6, 7 and 8. Understood in terms of raw volume, and taking into account the paramount position of detached or semi-detached dwellings, in most counties we can observe consistently higher volumes of larger dwellings with 3 or more bedrooms than smaller dwellings with 1-2 bedrooms. These smaller dwellings are significantly concentrated in Dublin City (c.196,000 units, or 50% of the total stock in the local authority area), almost 4 times the total volume present in the local authority area with the next highest concentration, Fingal, and constituting a quarter of all 1–2-bedroom dwellings in the State. Outside of Dublin City, the remaining Dublin local authority areas and Cork, there is a generally low volume of 1–2-bedroom dwellings, making up an average of 19% of stock.

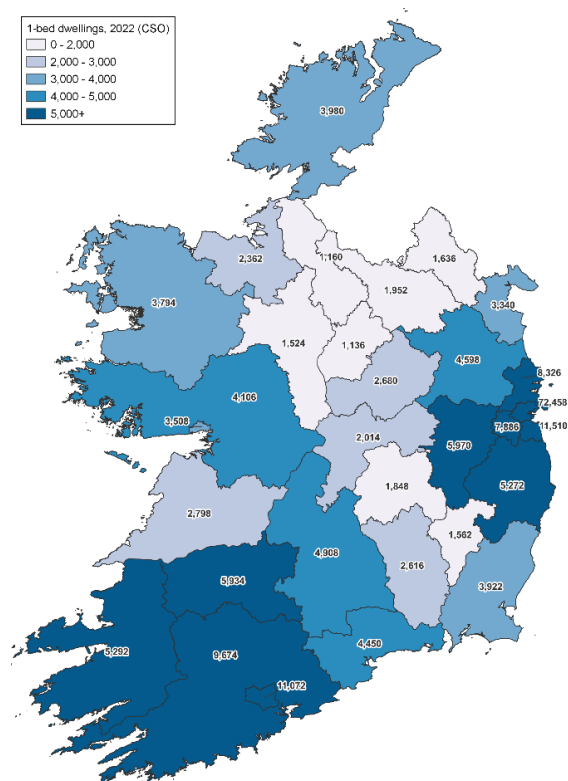
Though Dublin City also displays a high total volume of dwellings with 3 or more bedrooms (c.197,700 units, or 50% of the total volume in the local authority), it does not display the same predominance among other counties, with Dublin City stock making up only 8% of the total number of larger dwellings in the State and only exceeding the number in Cork County by c.4,000 dwellings. Outside of Dublin City, this unit type makes up an average of 80% of each county's stock, with highest concentrations in the remaining Dublin local authorities, Cork, Kildare, Meath and Limerick.

Table 2: Distribution of dwellings by number of bedrooms. 2022 (CSO)

County	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4+ bedrooms
Carlow	1,562	5,694	17,520	14,768
Cavan	1,952	6,614	17,712	25,490
Clare	2,798	11,730	31,360	37,846
Cork City	11,072	29,410	65,804	44,226
Cork County	9,674	32,500	94,674	98,456
Donegal	3,980	14,088	41,518	51,262
Dublin City	72,458	123,308	137,944	59,716
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	11,510	37,544	52,254	59,442
Fingal	8,326	41,304	83,592	64,030
Galway City	3,508	11,730	19,408	20,036
Galway County	4,106	13,642	36,188	68,784
Kerry	5,292	14,734	41,340	44,140
Kildare	5,970	21,730	61,250	62,874
Kilkenny	2,616	9,282	27,274	28,332
Laois	1,848	7,534	24,838	22,840
Leitrim	1,160	3,708	8,792	11,272
Limerick City and County	5,934	22,104	54,486	51,284
Longford	1,136	4,134	10,792	12,214
Louth	3,340	14,268	41,262	30,270
Mayo	3,794	12,534	33,050	45,530
Meath	4,598	17,678	49,808	61,560
Monaghan	1,636	5,438	15,108	19,542
Offaly	2,014	6,894	22,244	20,872
Roscommon	1,524	6,188	16,402	23,106
Sligo	2,362	7,224	17,602	21,358
South Dublin	7,886	28,080	96,812	49,284
Tipperary	4,908	15,918	45,736	45,810
Waterford City and County	4,450	14,774	38,060	28,816
Westmeath	2,680	8,832	23,498	26,002
Wexford	3,922	17,398	44,384	42,226
Wicklow	5,272	17,554	40,132	36,400

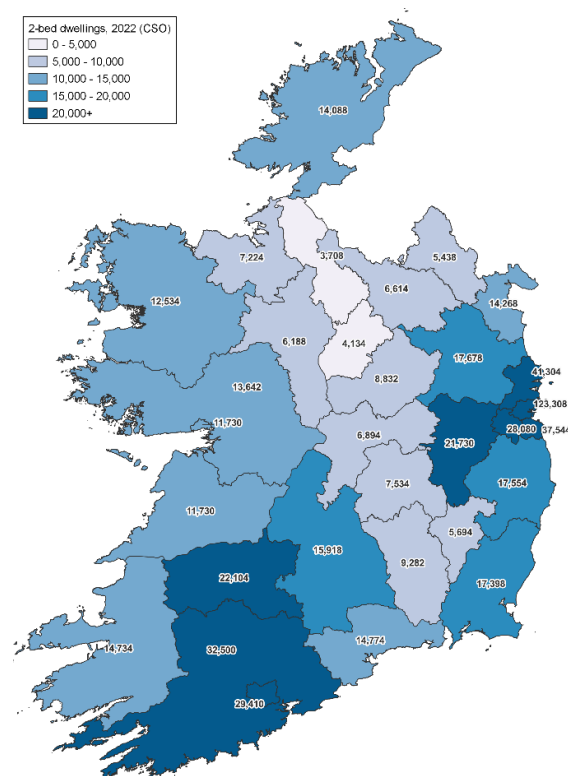
Source: <https://data.cso.ie/table/F2063>

Figure 6: Distribution of 1-bedroom dwellings. 2022 (CSO)



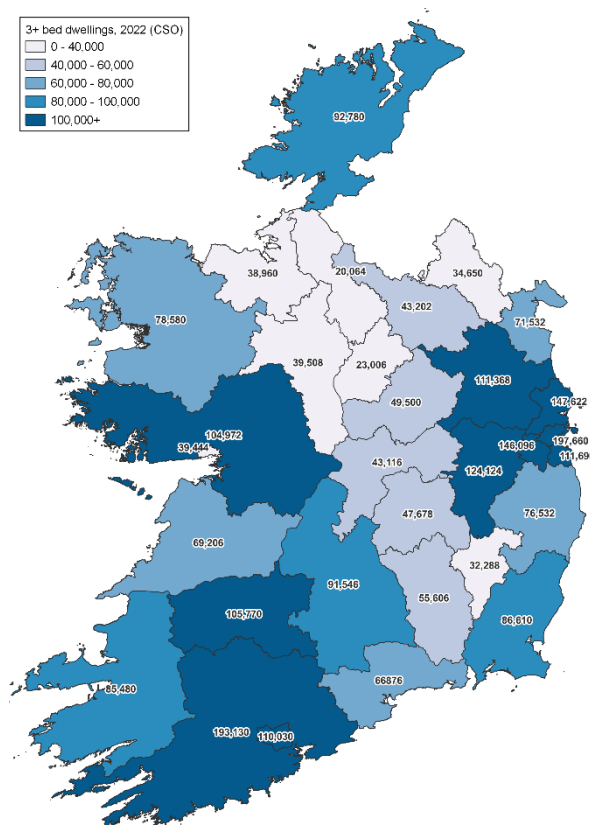
Source: Map produced by KPMG Future Analytics drawing on [Census of Population 2022 Profile 2 - Housing in Ireland - Central Statistics Office](#)

Figure 7: Distribution of 2-bedroom dwellings. 2022 (CSO)



Source: Map produced by KPMG Future Analytics drawing on [Census of Population 2022 Profile 2 - Housing in Ireland - Central Statistics Office](#)

Figure 8: Distribution of dwellings with 3 or more bedrooms. 2022 (CSO)



Source: Map produced by KPMG Future Analytics drawing on Census of Population 2022 Profile 2 - Housing in Ireland - Central Statistics Office

The clear trend is of high concentrations of smaller units in built-up areas and high concentrations of larger units in their surrounding regions. While this may indicate that market demand for particular housing types varies across the country, this also suggests there are opportunities to diversify the mix of housing options available on the market in many areas, particularly when assessed more locally.

2.4 Combining Census 2022 data for insights

Taking the additional step of comparing the composition of housing stock and the anticipated trends in population growth based on existing patterns of natural increase and migration, we can see there are whole sections of the country where a mismatch between demand for particular unit sizes and the needs of a growing population exists. We can note potential alignments and misalignments in several clusters of counties:

- Longford, Roscommon and Leitrim all experienced high rates of migration but have relatively low levels of housing stock in general. Moreover all display lower levels of housing stock diversity, with smaller units of 1-2 bedrooms making up between 16-19% of stock. The low rates of natural increase and the high average ages⁴ of the population in Roscommon (40.8) and Leitrim (40.7) in 2022 may indicate a future shift towards a greater demand for smaller units. With that said, if future migration rates reflect internal migration of young families seeking larger units or greater affordability, this housing stock mismatch may not significantly come to pass.
- Galway City has a notably high proportion of population growth attributable to natural increase rather than migration, which deviates from the pattern visible in other Irish cities. Despite this, it has a relatively low absolute volume of dwellings with 3 or more bedrooms. This could present difficulties for a city with a growing number of young families and potential associated demand for slightly larger units, though this could also present an opportunity for new or refurbished developments with mixed unit sizes to address the changing demographics of a growing population.

⁴ Source: <https://data.cso.ie/table/FY051B>

- Between 2011 and 2016, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow experienced some of the sharpest overall population growth in the country, arising from both natural increase and internal migration. Census 2022 also indicates that these counties represented the most popular destinations for movers who left Dublin in the year immediately prior to the census, constituting almost half (44%) of this group⁵, which may reflect a broader trend associated with remote working measures. The significant levels of housing stock with three or more bedrooms in these counties may be seen as both reflecting demand and potentially aligning with future demand suggested by the components of recent population change, particularly given the relatively young average ages in these counties (Meath: 36.9, Kildare: 36.9, Wicklow: 39.1).
- Westmeath and Laois experienced high rates of population growth arising from natural increase as opposed to migration. These rates are comparable to Meath and Kildare, but Westmeath and Laois have comparatively fewer dwellings of three bedrooms or more. The anticipated future demand evident in the census results combined with the housing composition may indicate a mismatch between the stock in these counties and the needs of families seeking to upsize in the future. This in turn may highlight an opportunity to diversify the available housing in these counties to address a broader base of suitably sized dwellings, particularly in growing towns such as Mullingar, Athlone and Portlaoise where supported by more detailed localised assessments.

The emerging picture is one of

- decreasing household size (if slowly in the last census period),
- an aging population with its own changing housing needs leading to a growing cohort of empty nesters,
- population growth in the Greater Dublin Area, South East and north Midlands significantly driven by migration,
- population growth in Laois, Offaly and Leinster outside of Dublin significantly driven by natural increase, and
- an existing base of housing stock where apartments and smaller units (the two aspects going hand in hand) concentrated in built up areas, and larger units in the regions surrounding them, if not universally.

Understanding the components and character of population growth, including both where it has grown and where we can anticipate it growing further, can help highlight opportunities to ‘get ahead’ of potential issues and implement appropriate policy or planning solutions.

The Census provides a trusted and necessary basis for projecting future scenarios. More than just a snapshot, the Census can speak to the pace, location and form of change that we need to understand in our respective sectors. It can be used to assess inertia and desire across a range of areas, not least for housing mix opportunity, but for a broad array of sectoral demand drivers.

Understanding this data and the insights that can be drawn from it provides a firm foundation from which future trajectories on how the Ireland of tomorrow can be crafted today.

3. 15-MINUTES PRINCIPLE FROM A PLANNING PERSPECTIVE

Within the planning domain, ‘15-minutes city’ is a concept that promotes a sustainable neighbourhood where the community has an easy access to their essential day to day needs like food and groceries, leisure, sport and recreation, healthcare, and education within 15 minutes’ walk from the housing which is the focal point of these amenities and services.

The primary objective of the 15-minute city is to ensure access to basic necessities within the 15-minute walking or cycling distance. As per the European Commission⁶, this revolves around the four dimensions of *proximity*, *diversity*, *density*, and *ubiquity*, therefore reducing distances to destinations; providing variety in land use and people, to make all relevant destinations easily reachable; ensuring a minimum customer pool for local businesses; and most importantly making 15-minute cities available and affordable for all.

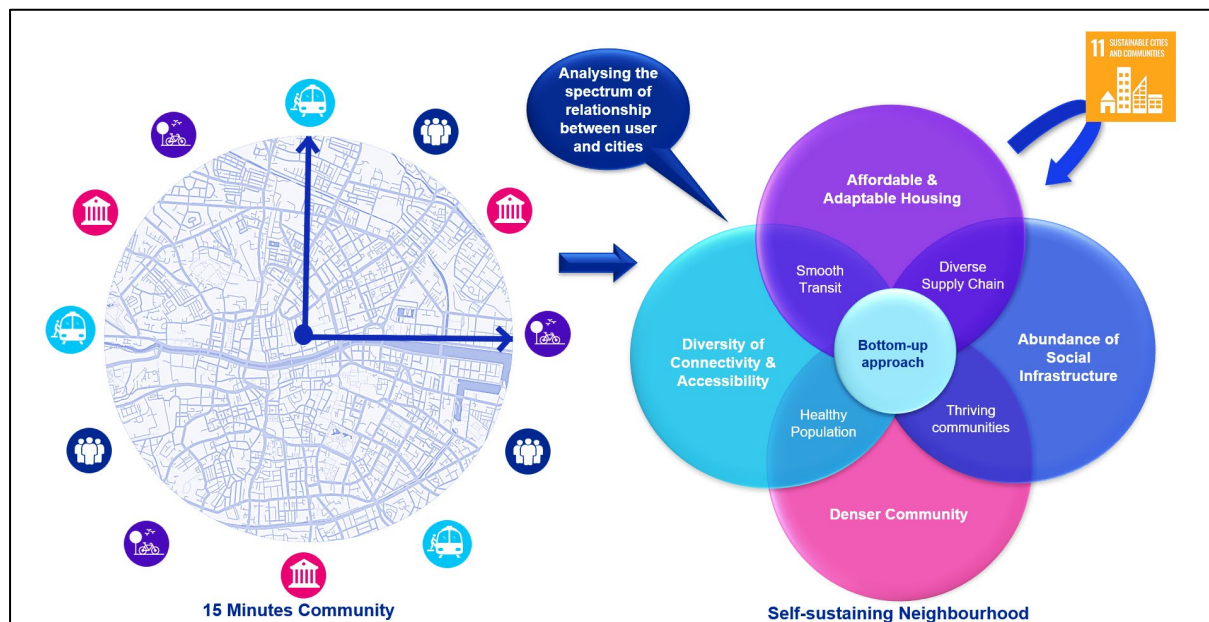
The term was initially coined in 2016 by Professor Carlos Moreno.⁷ The ultimate objective of this concept is to reduce the dependency on cars and create pedestrian friendly cities. The ‘15-Minute City’ concept aligns with the principles of ‘Chrono Urbanism’ and advocates for reduced proximity, social interaction captured by the density, dimension, digitalisation, and diversity pillar (Moreno et al., 2021). When density, diversity, digitalisation, and dimension pillars merge, it culminates into a self-sustaining neighbourhood. As illustrated in Figure 9, the amalgamation of these pillars’ upriser from the four core components of a self-sustaining neighbourhood: healthy population, thriving communities, diverse supply chain, and smooth transit.

⁵ Source: <https://data.cso.ie/table/F1058>

⁶ Proximity for all: implementing inclusive ±15-Minute City concepts | Smart Cities Marketplace (europa.eu)

⁷ <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2024/05/07/the-15-minute-city-carlos-moreno>

Figure 9: Relationship between a 15 Minute Community and Self-sustaining neighbourhood



Source: KPMG Future Analytics visualisation adapted from Planning and Management in Eco-cities, available from: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-bottom-up-city-based-approach_fig4_313447389 [accessed 9 Aug 2024]

Concerning healthy population, a well-connected neighbourhood reduces the commute time which is captivating for the inhabitants of a city. Residents prefer living in communities that are located on a commuter line as it improves the accessibility to jobs resulting significant cost cuts which includes car running costs and time. Neighbourhood areas located along a transport line attracts a large portion of population resulting into the genesis of a denser community. The spatial environment of a community has a profound influence on the health and wellbeing of its inhabitants. Increasing evidence suggests that land-use and transportation decisions can facilitate or obstruct the creation and maintenance of healthy communities (Dannenberg et al., 2003). In light of this, walkable neighbourhoods contribute towards ameliorating the social health by supplementing the level of physical activities within the residents.

Social infrastructure is a key in the matter of thriving communities. Social Infrastructure has multiple benefits related to education, health, and socio-economic development. This impacts the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of the residents within the community and these elements exert an influence on the quality of life of the residents. Social efficiency of development of the residential location, covers all the blocks creating the life quality of the population, particularly the increase in the level of development of health care and education (Stein, 2017). The abundance and accessibility of basic services and amenities enables a sense of place and community cohesion within the inhabitants. This generates a positive socio-economic impact on the community and uplifts community engagement which in collaboration creates resilient communities.

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To keep the social infrastructure in pace with the population and commiserate with the growth, there must be an appropriate supply of social Infrastructure to cater to the housing targets in cities. The increasing population of the cities are generating a greater and diverse need for the further amenities and services. Social infrastructure connects workers to their occupations and adds diversity to the community's supply chain, thereby allowing residents to pick and choose from a wider range of amenities. This boosts employment and businesses.

3.1 General premise around sustainable communities

The 15-minutes city is a transformative concept which amalgamates the elements of adaptable and affordable housing, denser community, diversity of accessibility and connectivity, and abundance of social infrastructure in a mix with facilities 15 mins for pedestrians and cyclists to create resilient and self-sustaining neighbourhoods for the communities. The famous Danish architect, Jan Gehl (Gehl, 2011) states urban vitality is largely dependent on a number of factors, including population density, building porosity, compactness, diversity and density of urban services, and the prominence of public spaces. Gehl's approach was primarily people-centred which emphasises on taking in account people's needs and wellbeing and with an eye towards boosting the stimulation between spaces between buildings before starting the planning process. Therefore, these elements are a key in planning healthy and prosperous cities.

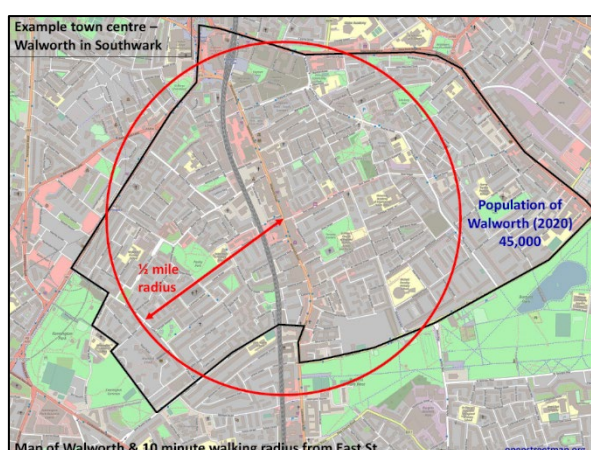
Neighbourhoods must consist of services and facilities that are essential for the communities to meet their day to day needs. When talking about the proximity of services in a neighbourhood, the preferences may vary from individual to individual. The heterogeneity of individual preferences and perceptions further complicates the implementation of the 15-minute city; differing priorities, whether for healthcare, education, employment, or cultural and recreational amenities, must be accommodated within the urban planning process to ensure a truly inclusive urban environment (Guzman, Oviedo & Cantillo-Garcia, 2024). The distribution of social infrastructure in neighbourhoods vary throughout countries based on standards and public preferences.

In order to enable safe and inclusive communities, creating a conducive environment for pedestrians and cyclists is prime. Pedestrians and cyclists perceive their commuting environment via multiple lenses like security, safety, comfort, familiarity, rate of crime etc. Many Built Environment (BE) factors like population or housing density, the concentration of retail outlets for groceries, land use diversity, commercial density, presence of sidewalks, traffic signals, size of parks affect people's walking decisions (Basu et al., 2022). Therefore, as a part of the 15-minutes approach, an increased emphasis is required in developing and securing investment for a well-connected active transport infrastructure. From the beginning of the planning process, an increased focus upon the granularity of public realm elements is required which in turn will facilitate the activation of streets and spread a sense of safety amongst the users.

3.2 Lessons to learn from a transformative project – A case study of Walworth Road Area, London, UK

This case study summarises a particular example of the implementation of 15-minute concept from United Kingdom. This exemplar from London demonstrates how a people centred approach is extensively adopted across the town centres of London with an emphasis on reviving the image of a city through the amalgamation of various elements of chrono urbanism and 15-minutes cities.

Figure 10: Map of Walworth and 10 minutes walking distance from East Street (Source: Southwark Council)



Source: [The 15-minute city: a London case study – London Living Streets](#)

During the pandemic, councils across London identified a large number of high streets around the town centres of London that held the potential to be transformed into sustainable neighbourhoods. Walworth Road in Southwark is one of the examples of such town centres. Surveys conducted Southwark Council shows that pre-covid Walworth stood out as one of the most walkable neighbourhoods in Southwark.⁸ The area consists of many amenities within a 15-minute reach from the Walworth Road, one of them being the pocket parks in East

⁸ [London town centres and 15-minute cities](#)

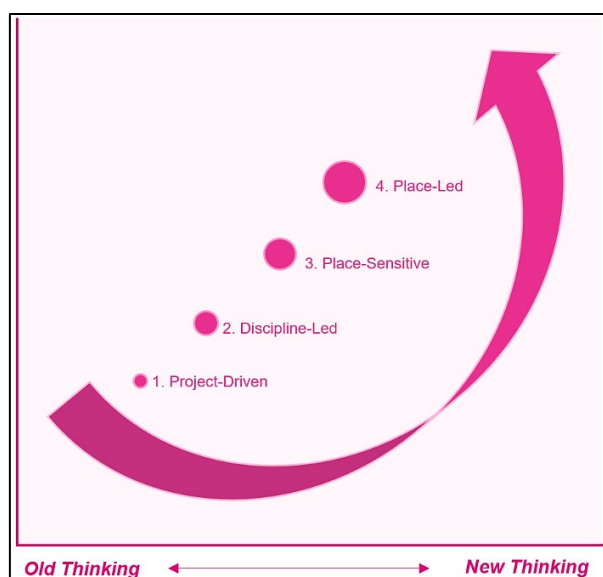
Walworth, as illustrated in Figure 10. There are quite low levels of car ownership in the area.⁹ Therefore, to make the best use of these elements of Walworth Road area and transform it into a low carbon sustainable neighbourhood, Southwark Council unveiled ‘Our Healthy Walworth’ Project under which the area was started to be redesigned in a sequential manner to enable high levels of walking and cycling within the area by introducing traffic calming measures, frequent crossings, wide uncluttered pavements, protected cycle lanes on high streets, reimagining the use of kerbside, replacing car parks with pocket parks, tree planting on the sides with canopy cover etc.¹⁰ As of present, many of the measures have been implemented in the area which resulted in the following improvements including restoration of the existing market barrows, brand street enhancements with new market furniture, Walworth market entrance improvements, East Street shopfront improvements, decluttering and better signage for the public toilets.¹¹

3.3 Need for a shift of paradigm

There are various players that influence the different stages of planning and design process. This includes stakeholders, public, private bodies, landowners, and institutions. In many cities across the world, ‘top-down approach’ has been observed as a traditional way of approaching the planning process. For all intents and purposes, top-down approach is crucial in facilitating the urban development in the cities, benefitting from a strategic vision set by the decision makers, however this approach could often fail to capture the citizens demands due to the prerequisite of adhering to a stringent legal framework combined with the lack of concurrence between multiple players involved in the process.

In order to combat this challenge and meet the evolving needs of the citizens, there is an imperative need to depart from the unconventional planning approach and move towards a up-to-the-minute approach keeping the citizen’s needs at the forefront (Figure 11). According to Project for Public Spaces (2022), in order to secure a place-led future, a truly place-led approach is required which not only relies on community input but also on a unified focus on place outcomes built on community engagement.

Figure 11: The ideal trajectory of evolution of development



Source: Investigating Users Changing Needs in Relation to Non-designed or Unplanned Public Spaces in Cairo, available from: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Evolution-development-over-time-Source-Project-for-Public-Spaces_fig2_357440129

This unconventional place-led approach also known as ‘bottom-up approach’ spotlights the social value of planning in a manner that profits the inhabitants from the development socially and economically both. The intersection of community driven approach and proper land use and zoning regulations sets out the social value outcome of integrated planning. From the outset, a continuous involvement of stakeholders during various stages of the process could help the decision makers better grasp the complex and intricate grassroots level issues of a space which is prime in transforming an urban space. Ultimately at implementation stage, this stimulates social equality, economic growth, and creation of a viable natural environment.

⁹ [London Living Streets](#)

¹⁰ [Our Healthy Walworth](#)

¹¹ [Elephants and Castles](#)

There is an essential need to ensure that opinions and interest of the inhabitants are entailed while formulating a strategic vision for an urban space. Social inclusion is an important strand of urban planning and planning has the ability to facilitate more socially inclusive societies through increased focus on integration and greater accessibility. Cities both, nationally and in the global context, are prioritising the promotion and development of a network of sustainable and inclusive neighbourhoods that can cater to all age groups, is in line with universal design standards and offers quality of opportunity and access to good services to all.

According to a report by the UN Habitat (2022)¹², one of the many components of inclusive urban planning is a focus on gender equality which is said to set urban planning on a course to become more inclusive and functional, ultimately more relevant to all. This report reiterates the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda of “leaving no one behind” and further identifies the critical role of gender equality and gender responsive planning as a tool to address the challenges of sustainable urbanisation. This approach seeks to collect a range of qualitative and quantitative gender and age disaggregated data to understand the beneficiaries, their challenges, and aspirations – which can be achieved through improved data collection, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes to better assess the impacts.

A study by Transport Infrastructure Ireland, which is a development, in the Irish context, toward exploring issues of equity in urban planning, is the study: *‘Travelling in a Woman’s Shoes’* which specifically focuses on *understanding woman’s travel needs in Ireland to inform the future sustainable transport policy and design*. This study, which investigates the needs and travel behaviours of women, is the first of its kind in Ireland. The study explores the importance of gender and transport not only to improve Ireland’s transport networks for all users, but also tackle a crucial growing concern – the urgent need to transition to carbon neutrality by 2050.

The study found differing trends in mobility patterns and trends among men and women, with women experiencing a greater ‘travel burden’ overall. Four factors were identified as commonly influencing women’s mobility – safety, access, reliability, and comfort and convenience. The study also acknowledged the need for transport policy and design to consider the impacts of mobility on women such as economic opportunities, social life and engagement, and health and well-being. Addressing the barriers in accessing public transport, which eventually results in increased car dependencies, by focusing on renewed approaches to designing public transport that people choose to use, requires a new level of gender-sensitivity in policy and practice.

Shifting the conventional lens to focus toward a more gender-sensitive one in the process of studying/designing pushes boundaries toward considering the shortcomings of conventional urban planning both in the policy making and practice. Stepping out of the comfort zone both in policy and practice, results in a compelling need to confront a level of discomfort or scepticism, increasing the collective and personal gender awareness¹³.

3.4 Apropos of the Irish scenario

The 15-minute city concept is gradually making a place in the Irish context. There is increased focus on healthy place-making in the national and regional planning context, which directly coincides with the principles of the 15-minute city. Healthy placemaking focuses on the delivery of compact and sustainable growth that incorporates well-designed, lifetime adaptable development in close proximity to existing services and facilities. As a result, the local policy context in Ireland is moving towards facilitating key objectives to develop compact, connected, low carbon, and climatically resilient cities. This requires further emphasis on efficient land management providing for balanced and sustainable development promoting a mixed-use pattern of development, gradually moving away from the more conventional forms / mono land use patterns.

There has been a drastic change in the way people live, work and travel, since the Covid-19 pandemic, with emerging hybrid working models that enable flexible and remote working. This is pertinent to the way in which people commute and subsequently the implications of this on their daily requirements. When individuals and families spend more time working from their place of residence, the need for local facilities and infrastructure continues to grow. This specifically includes services such as schools, childcare, community and arts / cultural facilities, parks, playgrounds, sports / leisure / recreational facilities, healthcare, etc., with efficient and enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes.

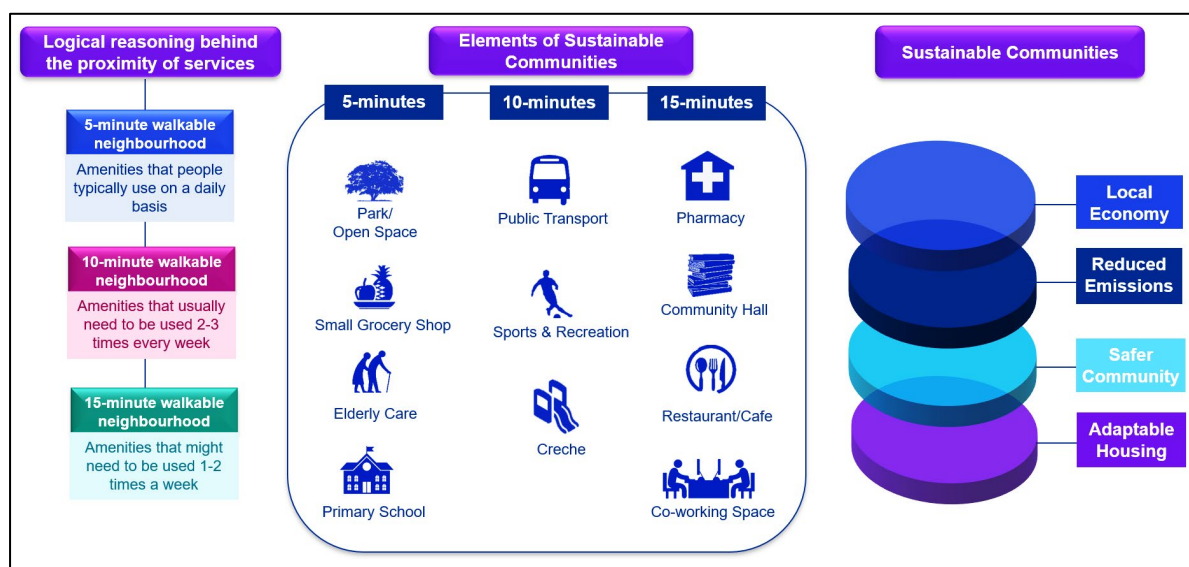
In Irish context, there is no consistent or broad rule of thumb specified in terms of the provision of Social Infrastructure facilities within X-minutes’ walk time or drivetime based on population. Since the primary goal of this approach is to promote active travel and shorten the commute time, a logical rationale could be used to determine the proximity of services based on the frequency with which people use the facilities, as illustrated in Figure 12. For instance, services like parks, open spaces, small grocery shops, fresh food, elderly care, primary and secondary schools that are typically used every day could be located at a proximity of 5 minutes from the

¹² [Cities for Girls, Cities for All | UN-Habitat \(unhabitat.org\)](https://unhabitat.org/cities-for-girls-cities-for-all)

¹³ [tii-travelling-in-a-womans-shoes-report_issue.pdf](#)

homes, whereas services like public transport, supermarkets, pharmacies, co-working spaces, community halls, co-working spaces that usually needs to be used two to three days during the week could be situated at a proximity of 10-15 minutes from the residential areas.

Figure 12: Elements of a Sustainable Community



Source: KPMG Future Analytics visualisation adapted from [Defining the 15-minute city | CNU](#)

While considering the ‘accessibility tenet’ to measure the proximity of Social Infrastructure, multiple other factors affecting the accessibility comes into play such as the standard of pedestrian facilities, active transport infrastructure investments, safety, and surveillance – all of which are key in evaluating the 15-minutes communities.

In this regard, while interventions are underway within the local policy context, the concept of the 15-minute cities has been introduced across the country, with the aim to promote a similar pattern of development and has further been reinstated at the national level. The most recent policy intervention being the new Sustainable Residential and Compact Settlement Guidelines (the Guidelines), which was published by the Government in early 2024. The Guidelines set out guidance in relation to the planning and development of urban and rural settlements with a focus on residential development and the creation of sustainable and compact settlements. Furthermore, a recent addition to complement the local development plan for Dublin City Council, is a ‘Cultural Toolkit’ which has been introduced to address some of the planning challenges facing the cultural sector. To promote the protection and enhancement of all types of cultural assets, the Council recognised the need for public and private investments and as a policy intervention for the current plan period introduced a requirement for provision of cultural infrastructure across all parts of the city. This provision will be made in tandem within the densification of the city to meet the targets of the NPF and RSES.

In the current local policy context, there is an increased focus towards protecting the arts and cultural assets of cities while allowing sustainable growth and expanding the range of spaces available to allow for cultural growth in tandem with population growth. It is also considered that cultural infrastructure would improve a city’s vibrancy, while contributing to its economic growth. A vibrant city with many cultural activities and attractions would ultimately result in increased residents, tourists, and visitors. Moreover, engaging and investing in Cultural infrastructure would further pave the path / encourage skills development and employment in creative industries.

The priorities of compact growth include an emphasis on the renewal of existing settlement pattern, including the dispersal of residential, commercial and employment uses within settlements and the impact this is having on people, economy, and environment. Dispersed development and settlement patterns create increased demands on travel further embedding a reliance on carbon intensive private cars and longer commute in turn also has an undesirable impact on the quality of life for those in the crux of this. This pattern of development also creates high demand for new infrastructure and services which can place heavy financial burdens on the state and result in a ‘constant cycle of infrastructure catch-up’.

The Guidelines further note that the 15-minute city concept has been used in the recent years to describe compact neighbourhoods that have a range of local services and amenities and access to public transport – all within a short walk or cycle of homes. Therefore, emphasis has been laid on supporting more intensive use of existing buildings,

previously developed land, and infill sites in built-up areas of existing settlements, in addition to developing sites in locations serviced by existing transport and infrastructure – to achieve compact and sustainable growth.

The National Sustainable Mobility Policy 2022 has targets set out for reduction in private car travel and subsequent increase in active travel, emphasising the need for design interventions within settlements at every level to support this transition away from private car use and enable ease of movement for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport. The increasing pressures of climate change has rendered this shift toward a more sustainable / active travel pattern an inevitable requirement to ensure human settlements are equipped to operate more efficiently, self-sufficiently, and sustainably.

The Climate Action Plan 2024 also sets out actions to drive decarbonisation of Ireland’s transport system. The framework for transport sustainability within the action plan emphasises the crucial role of spatial and land-use planning in designing transport systems that can support the net zero ambitions for the country. Albeit there is a high-level awareness around climate change across the country and globally, a shift toward low carbon transport will need to also be encouraged through a significant shift in transport behavioural change. To enable a behavioural change and reduce increased private vehicle dependency, there is need for public transport and active travel modes to be more gender neutral and attractive to all groups across the board.

As per TII’s study,¹⁴ choosing public/sustainable travel options for part of the population, is often negated by unsafe experiences and a perception that these modes are least safe way to travel given a lack of quality infrastructure. The overarching policy takeaway in relation to modes of transport, in the TII study, is for a gender mainstreaming in policy to introduce gender-sensitive perspectives across all aspects of the transport industry. The study also notes that in order to reduce car-centricity / dependency, considering policies that support the ‘20-minute city’ could be a step forward, as it ensures access to key services locally, reducing the need to use private vehicles. Furthermore, increased facilities / services promote additional activity, encourages footfall in turn instilling a sense of safety, security and belonging within the locality. Other interventions include (and is not limited to) improving last mile connections, prioritising pedestrians, and increasing physical and psychological safety. The study concludes that it is critical to ensure that alternative transport modes are reliable, accessible, convenient, and safe, while also delivering high-level needs – comfort, inclusion, health, joy, community, belonging.

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¹⁴ [tii-travelling-in-a-womans-shoes-report_issue.pdf](#)