

NESC report reveals uneven economic performance on island of Ireland

Employment growth for period 2000 to 2018 in the Republic is roughly double the rate of North

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The study found a broadly north-south income divide in the Republic, with the most prosperous areas south of a line between Galway and Dundalk, while in the North the divide is east-west, with more activity centred around Belfast. Photograph: iStock



The gap in economic performance on the island of Ireland between the more populated east coast and the rest of the country is underlined in a new report from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC).



It says that around 40 per cent of the island population live in the regions around Dublin and Belfast, offering potential for the further development of the economic “corridor” between the two, where incomes and educational standards are already above the average.

The report – A Regional Perspective on Ireland: North and South – by NESC economist Noel Cahill, points out that population growth in the Republic since 1911 has been 41.2 per cent, well above the 17.9 per cent increase in the North. Combined, the island population is now around 7 million people.

The areas with the slowest population growth in the Republic – the Mid-West (26.6 per cent) and the Border (30.6 per cent) – were still well ahead of the North, though population density north of the Border is already significantly higher.

Employment growth for the period 2000 to 2018 in the State, at 30.4 per cent, was roughly double the rate experienced in [Northern Ireland](#) over the same period (14.4 per cent).

Within the North, the strongest employment growth was in Belfast, with an increase of 25.4 per cent – Belfast accounts for close to one third of total employment in the North.

The share of the population in the Republic with third-level education (47.3 per cent) is considerably higher than in the North (40.6 per cent).

The study found a broadly north-south income divide in the Republic – with the most prosperous areas south of a line between Galway and Dundalk, while in the North the divide is east-west, with more activity centred around Belfast.

Disposable income

In 2018 disposable income per person in the Dublin region was 17.4 per cent above the average for the Republic, and higher than any other region. Income was lowest in the Border and Midland regions (18.2 per cent below average in each case), with these regions also faring worst in terms of third-level education and labour force participation.

Within Northern Ireland, the highest-income districts are close to Belfast – with incomes 7 to 15 per cent above average. Derry City and Strabane has the lowest income (11.5 per cent below average) and also fall below average on most of the other economic indicators examined in this paper.

Given that the area around the Border has fallen behind in terms of development, the paper sees potential in cross-Border efforts to develop infrastructure, investment and indigenous industry in this region.