

# Rathkeale in Brief

Key statistics from 2022 [CSO Census](#) and other sources.  
by David Lamont | 02/02/2024

Statistically Speaking  
Opinion backed by research

**R**athkeale is located on the N21 road, about 30 km southwest of Limerick city. The town is home to a population of 1,231 people, of which 30% are Irish Traveller. It is a town with a lot of potential, but it is also facing some challenges. Rathkeale needs to address the issues of low occupancy where the large migrant population is only shopping 5 of every 12 months; the lack of an anchor business or other attractant; and negative perceptions underpinned by media reports of undesirable Traveller behaviour (not ethnicity.) If the town can address these issues, it has the potential to become more vibrant and attractive, especially with the completion of the Foynes to Limerick motorway (Adare Bypass) that speeds the commute to/from Limerick City.



## Demographics

- The population of the urban Town area is 1,231 people. The town and hinterland have 1,408 people.
- 30% of the population are Irish Traveller.
- 55% of the population is female and 45% is male.
- 282 families have children.
- Youth represented 25% (306 people) of the population with about 127 teenagers.
- Working age adults were 57% (698 people) and those over 65 years of age were 18% (227 people).
- 82% of Rathkeale Town are Catholics and 51% regularly attend Mass.

## Socioeconomic Characteristics

- Nearly four out of ten people (39%) aged 15 or older have completed Primary or Lower Secondary school as their highest level of education.
- 37% of the household principals were at work, the lowest rate among comparable towns.
- 39% were unemployed, retired, or unable to work, the highest rate among comparable towns.
- 16% were looking after home or family, the highest among comparable towns.
- 9% were students, looking for their first regular job or in the census Other category.
- The Pobal HP Deprivation Index which measures Demographic Vitality and Labour Market Situations, shows Rathkeale is disadvantaged. The town urban area is extremely disadvantaged.
- The census notes 93 volunteers, representing 11% of the 15-69 age group.
- Around 10 clubs and societies cater to various interests, including the town's athletic prowess.

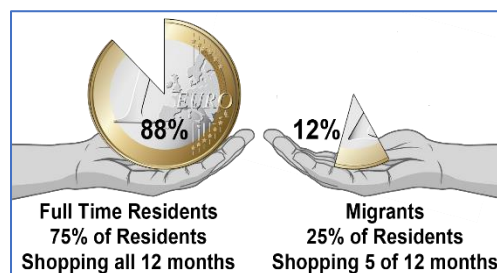
## Housing

- 96% of Rathkeale households live in a house, bungalow, flat or bedsit.
- Just 19 of Rathkeale households (4%) live in caravans or mobile homes.
- There are only 11 households on the sole halting site that do not have other properties in the town.
- Rathkeale's Settled and Traveller communities have self-segregated over the decades.

- Single person households account for 31% of the total 478 households.
- Just 9 residential properties changed hands in 2023 with an average value of €236,667.<sup>1</sup>
- 10 new dwellings were under construction in 2022. Observations suggest a similar number for 2023.
- Rathkeale has 44 derelict properties representing 11% of the county total.
- The planning process in Rathkeale is ineffective, and regulations are generally not enforced by Limerick City and County Council.

## Economic Activity & Facilities

- The main economic activity in Rathkeale is retail.
- Rathkeale has a hotel, 4 schools (including a secondary school), 2 churches, doctor, HSE clinic, industrial estate, garda station, fire station and a water treatment plant.
- There are about 80 businesses, mostly sole traders.
- The town loses about 4 businesses per year and 2023 saw the closure of the Welcome Centre with its Faillte Ireland Tourist Point.
- When shop premises are sold on Main Street they invariably get turned into residences, denying retail space to replacement businesses.
- Most of Rathkeale's facilities serve its teenage population (~127 people) and are generally unavailable to the wider community.
- Rathkeale has the only Limerick Youth Services centre outside the City plus a Foróige centre providing youth development programs.



## Environment

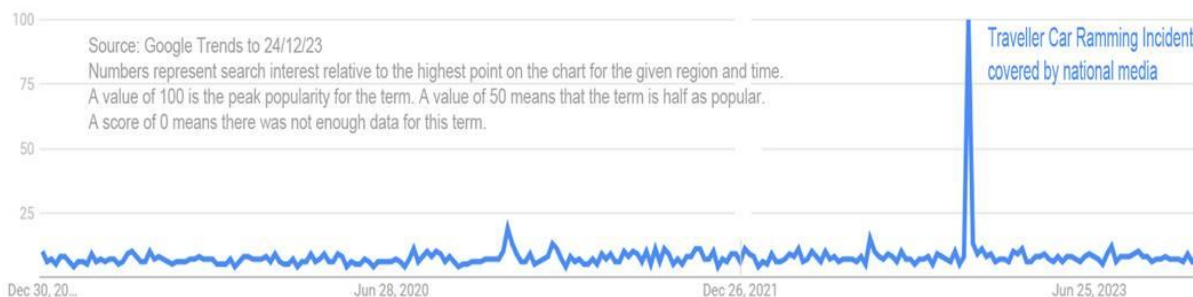
- The River Deel, which flows through Rathkeale, is not living up to its potential due to insufficient maintenance, pollution from various sources, and poor water quality.
- The Limerick Greenway starts in Rathkeale, sandwiched between a water treatment plant and noisy road. An attractive visitor hub is expected to open in 2024.
- There are two parks. One contains a historic abbey ruin. The other has a playground.
- The River Walk, which connects downtown to the Greenway, was repaved but is poorly maintained and not as attractive as it could be.
- Traffic congestion hampers access through Main Street and a series of small 90-degree turns make it difficult for trucks and busses to traverse the town.

## Crime

- 2022<sup>2</sup> saw a 20% increase in recorded crimes compared to 2020/2021.
- The top 3 crime categories are Theft, Violence, and Property Damage.
- Rathkeale has a higher crime rate per capita than nearby towns.

## In the News

- 2023 saw less coverage<sup>3</sup> than usual with 143 mainstream media stories mentioning Rathkeale. 53% were positive, 12% were negative, and 35% were neutral.
- Although 2023 had fewer stories about Traveller-related violence and anti-social behaviour, the ramming incident in December 2022 generated 13-times more interest than the 5-year average.



<sup>1</sup> Preliminary data to 27/12/23. The PSRA Register is not intended as a Property Price Index, it may not represent full market price, data changes, and it does include errors. The property listings also lack details making it impractical to compare like with like (e.g., an apartment sale vs. an apartment block sale.) Additionally, small towns like Rathkeale record about 4 or 5 sales per quarter so one sale can significantly impact the average. Anecdotal, is also possible that some Rathkeale sales are not registered, or the actual price was understated.

<sup>2</sup> 2023 crime data was unavailable at time of writing.

<sup>3</sup> This report likely underrepresents the volume of stories in mainstream media because online articles usually have a harder to find paper version. In general, positive stories are deemed likely to attract and negative ones repel people to/from Rathkeale, or they may create a positive or negative impression of the town. Whether a story is deemed positive, negative, or neutral has a subjective element.