



AI INFRASTRUCTURE CASE STUDY

IRELAND — REGULATION AND SOCIAL LEGITIMACY



Ireland is the clearest example of a country that has regulated data centre expansion decisively, and through energy policy alone. According to the Central Statistics Office, data centres accounted for 23% of the country's metered electricity consumption in 2025, up from 5% in 2015. Urban households accounted for 18% and rural households 9% over the same period. Data centre consumption has increased every year without exception since records began. Large energy users, a category that includes significant data centres, accounted for 33% of total metered consumption in 2025.

That trajectory produced a regulatory response. In 2021, following warnings from the transmission system operator EirGrid about generation adequacy and transmission constraint in the Greater Dublin area, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) directed system operators to assess data centre connection applications against criteria so restrictive that they functioned as a de facto moratorium. In December 2025 the CRU published its Large Energy User Connection Policy decision, ending the freeze under demanding conditions. Projects seeking more than 10 MVA must now provide proximate or behind-the-meter generation or storage sized to 100% of their grid connection, site in unconstrained locations on the network, and match 80% of annual demand with renewable generation investment in Ireland, with a six-year transition period. System operators were required to publish a dedicated connection process and enhanced network capacity information by 31 March 2026.

This is a demanding framework, however, every criteria is drawn from the energy system: security of supply, system stability, generation adequacy and compliance with Ireland's renewable energy target. None concerned who bears the cost of network reinforcement, who was consulted on the siting decision, whether affected communities had any say, or how the economic benefit is distributed. Grid capacity in this framework, is a technical resource rather than a scarce public good whose allocation is a distributive choice with consequences for rights.

In July 2026, responding to warnings about higher electricity prices for domestic users and risks to energy security, the Minister for Public Expenditure defended the sector on the basis that an estimated €104 billion in gross value added was enabled by data centre dependent sectors in 2024. Opposition parties have tabled moratorium motions and proposals for a data centre levy to offset costs falling on households. EirGrid's median scenario projects data centre demand rising from 9.4 TWh in 2025 to 14.6 TWh in 2034, taking the sector to 31% of national electricity demand. The lesson for companies and regulators is that a regulatory framework can be technically rigorous and still be silent on rights. Where the assessment criteria for a scarce public resource contain no procedural entitlement for affected populations and no test of benefit distribution, the resulting decisions will lack social legitimacy.

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- [Data Centres Metered Electricity Consumption 2025](#)
 - [The CRU Publishes its Decision on New Electricity Connection Policy for Data Centres](#)
 - [Data centres accounted for 23% of electricity usage last year - CSO](#)
 - [Data centres and energy](#)
 - [Ireland ends moratorium on grid links to data centers](#)
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