

Submission to the Department of Housing,
Planning and Local Community on *Ireland
2040 Our Plan:
National Planning Framework*

November 2017



Introduction

The Society of St Vincent de Paul recognises the process and progress that has been made in the development of the Ireland 2040 Our Plan draft. It will be pivotal in guiding both planning and investment decisions over the next 25 years. To ensure that Ireland 2040 truly delivers an Ireland of inclusive growth while also enhancing and protecting the prosperity and wellbeing of its citizens, will require deliberate prioritisation and political will to invest and initiate policies that address the inequalities of past and present. Ireland 2040 provides an opportunity to present a roadmap for all Irish society, which will ensure we are heading towards a positive and equitable future.

The Framework acknowledges that how future development in Ireland is planned will be a determinant of people's quality of life. In order to realise the vision and objectives outlined in Ireland 2040, and in a way that takes account of the change in demographics, will require significant and targeted public investment to sustainably tackle the infrastructural and service deficits that need to be overcome – particularly in the areas of housing, education and child care. The development of the corresponding National Investment Plan will need to address the need to broaden the tax base, put steps in place to ensure Ireland moves towards the European average for tax intake and redress the fact that Ireland has one of the lowest levels of public investment per capita in the EU 15.¹

SVP continually advocates for the need to improve Ireland's social infrastructure, as access to high quality public services are critical to ensure people can take up employment, make work pay and stay out of poverty. In this submission, we focus on the areas of most relevance to this objective.

Early years and education

The Ireland 2040 plan indicates that while the percentage of children under 15 will decline slightly and the average age of people in Ireland as a whole will increase, the number of people aged 15 or under is expected to continue to increase until the early 2020's. These demographic trends will require the necessary planning and investment in educational supports and infrastructure throughout a person's educational and developmental journey.

We welcome the particular recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to future growth and development, as well as the acknowledgement of investment in childcare and ECCE being critical as both an educational support as well as a prerequisite to job creation and labour market participation. Research consistently shows that inequalities in children's educational outcomes emerge early and persist throughout childhood and into adolescence. Ireland 2040 must ensure the provision of **high-quality, affordable and inclusive** early childhood education and care. When doing so, consideration will need to be given to meet the needs of families and children living in disadvantaged communities.

SVP fully agrees that 'education, training and life-long learning are key enablers, around which personal fulfilment, a fair society and a successful nation revolve', and we welcome the commitment to provide additional investment in primary, secondary, and third level infrastructure to keep pace with demographic demand. The commitment to building and acquiring new facilities to meet the needs of specific localities is welcome but prioritisation needs to also be given to addressing current deficits in primary, secondary and third level systems. Currently, total government expenditure on

¹ NERI (2017) Public Spending in the Republic of Ireland: A Descriptive Overview and Growth Implications
https://www.neriinstitute.net/download/pdf/public_spending_in_the_republic_of_ireland_a_descriptive_overview_and_growth_implications_wp.pdf

education is well below the EU average.² This funding shortfall and the cost of education places significant financial pressure on low income groups, limits the ability of those from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in education and perpetuates the cycle of disadvantage and exclusion. This imbalance must be rectified, and Ireland's investment in education should be brought into line with our European counterparts. Investing in education and training must go beyond the basic infrastructure and ensure provision in the corresponding investment plan to improve access to education for all ages and stages and in all geographical areas. When planning for the future, Ireland 2040 must consider the level of investment required for the provision of a quality and accessible public education system.

Housing

Over half a million additional homes will be needed between now and 2040. A more varied mix of housing will be needed than has been built to date. The Census data on housing highlighted the demographic changes that need to be planned for, including growing urbanisation, an ageing population, smaller average household size and more one-person households.³ SVP believe that the overarching objective driving housing planning going forward should be to ensure the provision of affordable, appropriate, sustainable and good quality housing for all. Furthermore, Ireland 2040 references the target of providing 25,000 houses a year yet indications are that this number is significantly below what is required. The ESRI presented a revised estimate of demand in July 2017 in the range of 30,000-35,000 units per year.⁴

A fundamental problem that must be addressed is the continuing overreliance on the private market to address housing need. Ireland 2040 must prioritise increasing the provision of social housing, and reverse the policy of relying on the private rented sector to meet social housing need for low income groups. This requires a significant investment in the development and delivery of homes by local authorities, as well as housing associations. In parallel, more effective action is needed to help people acquire secure and affordable accommodation. The need to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing is highlighted by the fact that working households which qualify for social housing increased by 25% from 2013 to 2016.⁵

Local Authorities must be positioned and enabled to play a strong lead role in the building and acquiring of social housing with the requisite increase in local authority housing staff. From the outset of Ireland 2040, local authorities need to be better supported to again become the main deliverers of social housing units. A review of local authority resourcing and skillsets should be undertaken with the view to recruitment and/or transfer (from other local authority departments) of housing related professionals to work in housing departments e.g. social workers, architects, planners, engineers etc to address the specific accommodation needs of those that are homeless, people with disabilities and older people.

As a step towards addressing the issue of supply of affordable housing that will be required to meet the need outlined in Ireland 2040, SVP believes that the provision under Part V should be reviewed to increase developers' Part V contributions to a minimum of 20% of the total development, with an additional 10% allocated particularly for affordable housing.

² NERI (2017) Public Spending in the Republic of Ireland: A Descriptive Overview and Growth Implications
https://www.neriinstitute.net/download/pdf/public_spending_in_the_republic_of_ireland_a_descriptive_overview_and_growth_implications_wp.pdf

³ <http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2017/census2016profile1-housinginireland/>

⁴ <https://www.irishbuildingmagazine.ie/2017/07/28/construction-industry-will-complete-18000-homes-this-year/>

⁵ <https://www.housingagency.ie/Housing/media/Media/Publications/Summary-of-Social-Housing-Assessment-Needs-2016.pdf>

A guaranteed percentage of houses under schemes such as LIHAF must also be made available at affordable prices, with local authorities having oversight of the housing types that will be built on the land.

In responding to the current housing situation, there is the opportunity to make provision to prevent the repetition of the boom and bust cycle of the Irish property market and mitigate the risk of future crises. Improved connections across departments and between local authorities and national level are also needed, in order to drive a holistic national approach. Such action will require short-term initiatives combined with a long-term focus. A long-term strategy would further allow for targeted countercyclical interventions in the housing market. The Capital Plan and Ireland 2040 which underpins it, presents a great opportunity to set out such a long-term perspective and the planning needed.

Rural Transport and Infrastructure

SVP has over 11,000 members coming alongside and supporting families and individuals at all levels of Irish society, throughout the island of Ireland. The steady decline of services in rural areas is consistently raised and a great cause of distress as people struggle to access basic services such as a post office, medical appointments, banks or Community Welfare Officer, with people having to travel further distances. Furthermore, a lack of access to transport in rural areas results in people being unable to access essential services, employment or training, and leading to social isolation.

According to the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2017 report, the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living for households living in rural areas is higher, primarily due to the higher cost of private transport.⁶ These additional costs place people living in rural areas at greater risk of income inadequacy and poverty.⁷

It is disappointing that the 'Planning for Diverse Rural Place' does not contain a specific National Objective in relation to public transport links in rural areas. Furthermore, there are currently no County transport strategies, or indeed national transport strategy. There is a clear need for joined up thinking and a plan that can ensure those in rural and more remote areas remain connected and can access vital services when needed.

At this important juncture in Ireland's economic recovery and as we begin to look towards the centenary of the foundation of our State, the words of our Founder Frederic Ozanam seem particularly pertinent,

'I am asking that you look after people who have too many needs and not enough rights – people who demand with reason a greater say in public affairs, freedom from poverty, access to education and security in employment.'

⁶VPSJ (2017) Minimum Essential Standard of Living Update Report <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2017-update-report/>

⁷ CSO (2017) Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2015 <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions2015/>