



Irish Rural Link Submission to Ireland 2040 Our Plan

**Section 5: People with Disabilities Edited by Disability Federation
of Ireland**



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Irish Rural Link Submission to National Planning Framework: 2Ireland 2040 Our Plan

Summary

Issue	Recommendations
Regional Development	<p>The lack of balanced Regional Development over the years, has seen some parts of the country growing faster than others, with some areas being left behind.</p> <p>There needs to be a collective approach to Regional Development, where Local Authorities within a region work together to establish Regional Development Groups to overcome the macro barriers that prevent business and companies starting up or locating to a region.</p>
Employment and Quality of Jobs	<p>The BMW region and South East region of the country are still experiencing higher percentage rates of unemployment that the national average. The quality of jobs, especially in BMW region are often minimum wage, zero contract jobs.</p> <p>More jobs and better quality of jobs must be created in other regions outside the capital. Quality employment is essential to develop sustainable growth of regions.</p>
Supports for SME's and Micro-Enterprises	<p>SME's and Micro-Enterprises are the backbone of rural economies. The decrease in access to credit for these companies since the financial crash continues to hinder their growth and new start-ups.</p> <p>Local Public Banking is a sustainable source of credit lending to SME's and needs to be seriously considered going forward if we are to develop our Regions.</p>
Public Transport	<p>The lack of a decent and reliable public transport system continues to be a challenge for people, especially in rural Ireland, in accessing employment, and other services.</p> <p>A comprehensive review of public transport in Ireland needs to be carried out. A decent, reliable public transport service accessible for every person.</p> <p>The Rural Transport Programme must be properly funded and resourced and be included in an overall review of public transport.</p>
Broadband	<p>National Broadband Plan must be delivered within the given timeframes and provisions must be made within Broadband Plan to upgrade speeds with advancements in technology.</p>
Renewal of Towns and Villages	<p>Rural towns and villages were decimated during the crisis and have struggled to recover. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme must be part of Ireland 2040 Plan and getting people back into the main streets of both rural and regional towns must be a key priority in this plan.</p>
Sustainable Housing	<p>The current housing shortage in the capital which is now spreading to commuter counties is a warning sign that a more regional based development plan is required.</p> <p>Incentives to get people back living in or on the edge of small towns and</p>

	villages must be made available and legislation must be changed to allow the use of vacant commercial buildings be converted to residential premises.
Rural Schools and Resources	Many rural schools were closed or amalgamated over the years without any consideration given to the impact this had on students, parents or indeed communities. The local school plays a vital role in a community and every effort must be made to ensure that they have adequate resources and amenities. Future school closures or amalgamations should not happen unless a full impact study of the closure on a community and students is carried out.
Services for Older People	<p>Ireland has an ageing population with the number of people over the age of 65 expected to double over the next thirty years.</p> <p>Ireland 2040 must outline plans to be implemented over the coming years to ensure the necessary services are in place to meet growing demand.</p> <p>IRL have called for some time now for Meals on Wheels to be part of an overall health and service plan for older people. This service needs better recognition from HSE and Government and be adequately resourced.</p>
Access to Health Care/Mental Health Care and Specialist Healthcare	<p>The two-tier health system that continues to exist in Ireland must be addressed. 'Ireland 2040 Our Plan' is an opportunity to address this issue.</p> <p>Access to specialist healthcare in Centres of Excellence poses extra cost on people who have to travel long distances to access these services. A review of what treatments could be carried out in local hospitals should be examined.</p> <p>IRL recommend that each HSE region would have a dedicated Community Development Officers to promote better health and wellbeing in a community and ensure that health inequalities are removed and access to healthcare is based on need.</p>
Better Quality of Life and Wellbeing	<p>With most of the country's employment being based in the Capital, people are commuting long distances to work and spending up to four hours or more in their car or public transport.</p> <p>Regional development is needed to ensure Ireland's people can enjoy a better quality of life. The development of walkways and greenways around the country are being enjoyed by many. Raising awareness of the value of peatlands and wetlands can bring to a community and getting community involved in developing them as a source of recreation is needed.</p>
People with a Disability	IRL support our colleagues in Disability Federation of Ireland in their ask for proper incorporation of and provision for people with disabilities in the Ireland 2040 Plan, in line with the UN CRPD to ensure that people with disabilities are treated as equal members of the community, and provided with equal access to services and the environment.

Overview

Irish Rural Link (IRL) is the national network of rural community groups, representing over 1200 community groups and over 25,000 individuals committed to socially, environmentally and economically sustainable rural communities. The impact of the recession is still being felt in many rural areas and have not seen the same level of economic growth or employment as more urban areas have over the past couple of years. People in rural areas continue to subsidise urban dwellers by paying for public services such as buses that they cannot access. They cannot access a widespread rural transport service or take advantage of free travel entitlements. Much the same can be said about amenities such as libraries, public swimming pools etc. The potential for school amalgamations with no consideration of the impacts this has on a community or on families in terms of the cost of transport and the closures of Garda stations in the absence of proper community policing continue to be great concerns for rural communities.

The increase in employment over the past two years has mainly been concentrated in the urban centres, especially in Dublin. This has resulted in younger people from other parts of the country migrating to these areas to gain employment. This, along with high levels of emigration during the recession has left parts of rural Ireland extremely isolated and with an ageing population. Census 2016 showed an overall increase in population in Ireland to 4.76 million people. However, there was a decrease in population in the counties of Donegal, Mayo and Sligo, with population growing less than one percent in Roscommon, South Tipperary and Leitrim¹. This continues to lead to a disparity in economic growth, with urban areas becoming overly populated while other parts of the country see little or no growth and become more sparsely populated. This in turn will lead to a range of social issues for those who live in these areas.

The development of Ireland 2040 plan is a real opportunity for this Government to set the groundwork for a more sustainable country which allows every part of the country to grow and develop equally with equal opportunities available to all regardless of whether living in an urban or rural area.

Previous planning strategies and reports have attempted regional development in the past. The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 was designed to deliver more balanced social, economic and physical development between regions. It was developed at a time when the country was growing but employment opportunities were becoming more concentrated in

¹ CSO (2017) Census 2016 Preliminary Results <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpr/censusofpopulation2016-preliminaryresults/copc/>

some areas, while other areas still had weak economic growth. Towns within regions across the country became Gateways and Hubs with the Midland region having a linked hub between the towns of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar. Development of these gateways and hubs were to flow into the rural hinterland so every person would benefit from economic growth². However, this strategy was never fully implemented, due in part to the economic crisis followed by recession but also due to towns within regions competing against one another.

Many of the aims of the National Spatial Strategy were similar to those of the Buchanan Report of 1968. This report took a more balanced view of managing Ireland's growth and reducing the dependency on Dublin; creating local and regional centres across the country, allowing for more employment and better quality employment in all regions. However, this plan never received political support and was never given serious consideration as an option.

² Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2002 '*National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020*' <http://www.irishspatialstrategy.ie/>

Section 1: Regional Development

Ireland 2040 needs to have a more balanced approach for development and growth.

Since the launch of the consultation process for Ireland 2040 plan there have been suggestions for the development of another city in the Midland Region. Irish Rural Link are not fully opposed to this, however, it would be concerned that it may be developed at the detriment of other major towns in the region. It would favour a more collective approach to regional development such as Local Authorities in each region coming together to form Regional Development Groups. They can collectively look at macro barriers to setting up enterprises or preventing companies locating in their region such as planning, cost of rates, investment in broadband and mobile coverage, energy requirements, etc. By three or four Local Authorities coming together in a region, the cost of providing these services could be reduced. This could reduce towns within each region competing against each other, like what happened with the National Spatial Strategy and will develop the region as a whole, with the benefits reaching the surrounding hinterlands.

Employment

Although unemployment has decreased to 6.7% in the year to Q4 2016, it still remains above the national average in the border, midlands and western counties. Unemployment in these regions was 8% and 7.9% respectively in Q4. The South East region still had an unemployment rate of 9.4%³. Long-term unemployment still accounts for over 50% of those unemployed, with the western region having the highest rate of unemployment in the state, especially among under-25's⁴.

The quality of jobs available in rural areas tends to be lower than in urban area, with a higher number of people employed in lower paid sectors. Many jobs in retail/wholesale, hotel and catering, tourism are zero contracts. In rural areas, these are the jobs many people work in as there is very little alternative unless they commute long distances to work, which is not always an option for people.

There was an 8.6% decline in the number of active enterprises registered in Western Counties⁵ between 2008 and 2014. In other counties this figure was 1% below that of 2008.

³ CSO (2017) Quarterly National Household Survey Q4 2016

<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/qnhs/quarterlynationalhouseholdsurveyquarter42016/>

⁴ Western Development Commission (2017) WDC Insights into Western Region <http://www.wdc.ie/how-is-the-western-region-doing/>

⁵ The Western Counties include; Clare, Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal.

The sectors in which active enterprises were higher in western counties than in the rest of the state included; Construction, Wholesale & Retail and Accommodation & Food Service. There were a large number of sole traders and micro enterprises in these sectorsⁱ.

The high cost of and limited access to transport and broadband in rural areas can deter companies locating or setting up in these areas. Investment in rural areas and provisional towns is essential to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is available to support the set up of companies and enterprises to carry out their business and in turn create employment. A study for IE Domain Registry found that a quarter of small businesses that do not have a website are being kept offline due to poor broadband, with a third not having the time to go onlineⁱⁱ. Local Authority rates are also a major factor in determining location of a company starting up and planning permission can cause delays.

The *'Regional Action Plans for jobs'* intends to create 135,000 jobs outside of Dublin; this is reiterated in the Actions in *'Realising our Rural Potential' Action Plan for Rural Development* by 2020. Regions will have to compete for funds and proper infrastructure to attract jobs into these areas.

Regional job strategy needs to take the issues outlined above; rates, planning permission, cost of electricity, transport, lack of broadband, etc. and look how they inform how policy works. There needs to be a regional structure, similar to that of the Gateways in the National Spatial Strategy. Regional Job Strategy must be linked to a regional structure that must be developed in Ireland 2040. Enterprise Ireland and IDA must play a part in funding these regions.

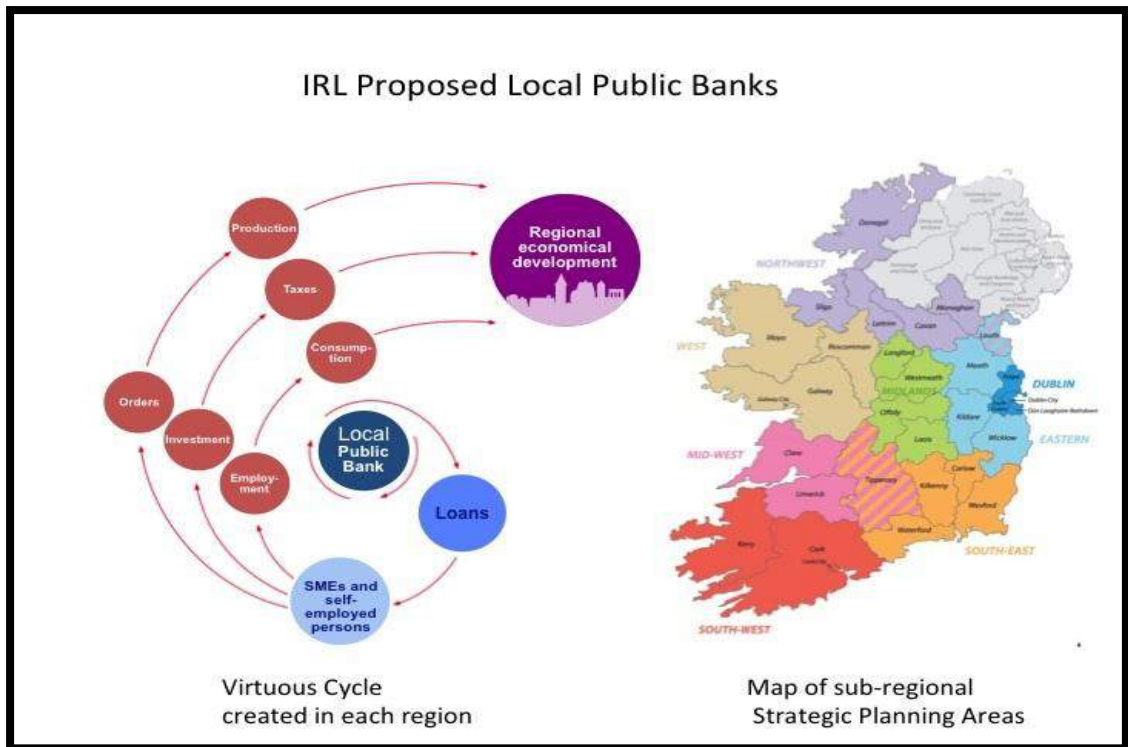
Local Public Banking

As mentioned above, small & medium enterprises and microenterprises remain a key employer in rural areas. SME's are still finding it difficult to access credit from the banking system and are therefore unable to reach their full potential. They are also more vulnerable to external financial shocks.

Irish Rural Link have proposed that the Irish Government thoroughly investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well defined regions and we welcome this was included in *'Programme for a Partnership Government'* and since then Minister Ring's announcement, as one of the actions outlined in *'Realising Our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development'*, for consultation on this.

This model of banking covers the 26 counties nationally and works on a regional basis following key principles of the "Framework for the Development of Regional Enterprise Strategies." The model is not based on a theory but on an existing regional working banking model bringing prosperity by creating a virtuous cycle of money circulating in the local economy. The concept proposal makes provision for inclusion of post offices and credit unions as part of invigorating local communities particularly in the area of SME's and the Agri sectors that allow commerce to thrive.

- The IRL proposal suggests a nationwide network of 8 to 10 Local Public Banks which are managed independently but with an identical business model working under identical management principles. Initially 2 or 4 pilot banks are envisaged with a rollout of the entire network developed over the next 5 years.
- In addition a centralised service unit will provide internal services, including risk management and internal audit and will house a self-supervision unit for the new public banking system.
- The new Local Public Banks will follow a specific business model that is different from traditional commercial banking. The new public banks will have to be economically viable but they will not pursue profit maximisation. At the same time they will be enabled to fulfil a public mandate because they will not be under pressure to make dividend payments.
- Earnings will partly be retained to strengthen their capital base and partly distributed to social projects, also surpluses will be partly distributed to social funds to benefit the local community.



Recommendations:

The following are recommendations for better regional development

1. Cross Party and Cross Department Working

'Ireland 2040' needs a whole of Government and cross department approach. All political parties must be involved in the development of this plan to ensure that it is carried forward by subsequent Governments. All Government Departments must be involved and cross Department working and joint up thinking of Departments needs to happen to ensure the full implementation of the plan.

2. Collective Approach to Regional Development

There needs to be a more collective approach to regional development in this plan. Local Authorities within each region must work together to establish Regional Development Groups. Local Authorities must work together to overcome macro barriers that prevent business either starting up or locating to a particular region. They need to set same rates for each town within each region, have same level of broadband speeds, and access to proper infrastructure so they can grow as a region and not be in competition of one another as was the case with the National Spatial Strategy.

3. Increased Employment and Quality Jobs

Some regions across the country are still experiencing higher unemployment levels than the state average. More jobs and better quality jobs must be created in other regions outside the capital so people do not have to move or spend 2 hours or more each way commuting to work. Employment and quality employment is essential to develop sustainable growth of regions.

4. Supports for SME's, Micro-Enterprises and Start Ups

More supports need to be in place for Small & Medium Companies, Micro-Enterprises and for entrepreneurs. SME's and Micro Enterprises are the back bone of rural economies and are a valuable employer. Better supports need to be in place to ensure these businesses can grow and expand and incentives put in place for entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.

5. Local Public Banking

Local Public Banking needs to be seriously considered by the Government as a source of credit lending to SME's. This alternate banking structure needs to be part of '*Ireland 2040 Plan*' in order for SME's in rural areas to grow and create employment while at the same time building local communities.

Section 2: Development of Reliable and Sustainable Infrastructure

In order to support regional development, the necessary infrastructure needs to be in place. As outlined in the previous section, the lack of broadband, local authority rates and planning permission can all negatively impact companies locating in a particular area and can hinder the setting up and expansion of enterprises. The lack of a reliable public transport system has also hindered development.

Transport

The lack of a decent and reliable public transport system continues to be a challenge and obstacle for people living in rural areas in accessing employment, health services, hospital appointments, education and training and day to day business. The over reliance on cars for people living outside of Dublin is a result of the lack of a proper functional transport system. Vulnerable groups and those who are unable to afford a car living in rural areas or indeed are most affected by this and make it more difficult for them to gain employment or make medical appointments. They rely on the goodwill of family members and neighbours to meet appointments and to go to the nearest town to do their day-to-day business.

The Rural Transport Programme continues to be underfunded. Although the budget for RTP was increased by €2million for 2017; it still remains below the €18million it was supposed to be by 2016. Rural Transport needs to play a key role in Ireland 2040 and have a bigger part in the overall delivery of public transport.

Broadband

As mentioned in Section 1, the lack of quality broadband has hindered the development of regions and especially rural areas. A proper broadband infrastructure would promote rural development allowing people to compete for jobs that might otherwise be located in urban areas. It would also allow for people, especially women, to work from home or start up their own business. With the move towards online banking, online billing, and other services moving to online, people in rural areas are unable to access these services as a result of the lack of reliable broadband. Also, the opportunity to stay in touch with family and friends who may have moved abroad is limited to telephone, which can be expensive.

Recommendations

6. Comprehensive Review of Public Transport in Ireland

A comprehensive review of all public transport in Ireland is now needed. This plan is an opportunity for this Government and subsequent Governments to establish a decent, reliable public transport service accessible for every person.

7. Rural Transport Programme

If this plan is going to give people a “*sense of belonging to community and place*”, the rural transport programme must be properly funded and resourced so people can remain connected to the rest of the country. This has been a lifeline for many people living in rural communities but there are still people who don't have access to it. More routes and services are needed on this programme and it must be included in an overall review of public transport.

8. Accessible Transport for All

At present many Bus Eireann fleet are not wheelchair accessible. A wheelchair user has to phone Irish Rail in advance to ensure there is a ramp and a wheelchair accessible carriage on the train, the hope to use. This means extra planning on the part of the wheelchair users if they need to travel and they don't have the luxury of taking unplanned journeys. All public buses need to be wheelchair accessible whether this includes low floors or lifts.

9. National Broadband Plan

The full roll out of the National Broadband Plan must be completed in the current timeframe stated with every effort made to reduce this timeframe where possible. Provisions need to be made within the Broadband Plan to upgrade speeds when necessary so businesses and homes have proper connectivity.

Section 3: Development of Sustainable Communities

Building communities and ensuring they are sustainable for future generations is essential for Ireland 2040 Plan. Whether these are rural or urban communities, people need to be made feel that they have a place they belong to.

Renewal of Towns and Villages

The number of shopping centres built during the boom increased significantly that by 2012 Ireland had the highest number of shopping centres per capita among 24 European countries. Ireland had almost 500sqm of shopping centre space per 1,000 people⁶ more than twice that of Italy. Many of these shopping centres were built on the outskirts of regional towns, providing everything under the one roof for consumers including ample parking space at a reduced cost. This resulted in a decrease in footfall from the main street, with shops and businesses either moving to the new shopping centres or closing because of the reduced footfall leading to a decline of town centres.

Rural towns and villages are still feeling the impact of the recession and with the closure of many essential services such as post office, banks, bus routes, they have continued to struggle.

In August 2016, Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs launched the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The main aim of the scheme is to support the revitalisation of towns and villages in order to improve the living and working environment of their communities and increase their potential to support increased economic activity into the future.

Better connectivity between regional and rural towns and villages can create mutual benefits for both. Creation of quality employment in regional towns will encourage people to move or remain in a region which can filter out to the rural hinterland. While at the same time the revitalisation of rural towns and villages and people back living in these towns and villages can supply labour to employers in regional towns while also retaining and creating services and employment in the smaller towns and villages.

⁶ Article in Irish Independent 'Ireland has the most shopping centres per capita in EU' 04/08/12
<http://www.independent.ie/business/irish/ireland-has-the-most-shopping-centres-per-capita-in-eu-26883253.html>

Sustainable Housing

The current housing shortage in the capital which is now spreading to commuter counties is a warning sign that a more regional based development plan is required. Dublin and the Greater Dublin Area are stretched to capacity in terms of housing. Creation of quality jobs outside of Dublin can help ease this housing pressure and reduce the need for people to commute long distances to work.

Rural housing stock tends to be one-off housing. Unless a person or family own or work on a farm one-off housing is not sustainable for the lifetime of the person. It can be isolating for people, especially older people and even for children, where the nearest neighbour maybe a mile away or more. It necessitates a car if not two or indeed three for families who need to drive children to school, after-school activities or local amenities and to friends, adding extra costs to a family.

Rural households, especially those living in older housing stock, are at greater risk of fuel poverty due to many being one-off houses. There is less choice of fuels that can be used in rural areas. Piped gas is not available to many rural homes so there is a higher dependency on oil and solid fuels. This also leads to limited opportunities to take advantage of bundle deals offered by gas and electricity suppliers.

There is still a sense among people that they need to build their own home in a rural area is idyllic and privacy could be compromised if they live in a housing estate, big or small, or above a shop.

Rural Schools

The local school can be a key part of a community and play a vital role in tightening that community. Although these schools tend to be smaller in size, parents can be encouraged to send their children there as they feel that the teacher can give each student more attention. Also, any learning difficulties a student has can be detected early on in their schooling. Over the past few years, many rural schools have closed or were amalgamated with other larger schools without any social impact reviews carried out, many not having the necessary facilities in place for the new students. They were leaving perfect school buildings to sit in prefabs. Any school closures or amalgamations must have impact assessments and review if students are better off as a result of a move.

Recommendations

10. Renewal of Town and Village Scheme

The renewal of town and village scheme must be incorporated into Ireland 2040 plan and must be fully implemented. Getting people back and retaining people to remain in towns and villages will bring life back into rural areas and is key to building sustainable communities.

11. Role for LCDC's

Local Authorities must work with and consult their Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) to ensure their Local Economic Development Plan and the LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS) is being implemented or if there are improvements that could be made. Town committees have worked well in some areas and these could be replicated and adapted for other areas.

12. Incentives to Live in Towns and Villages

Incentives to get people back living in or on the edge of small towns or villages must be available. This will ensure more sustainable living for people throughout their lifetime. It will also ensure that people will have easier access to services and amenities and it will also reduce isolation and loneliness which is very often experienced living in one-off housing. Some incentives are included in the *'Renewal of Town and Village Scheme'* and *'Realising our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development'*. These incentives need to be reflected in *'Ireland 2040 Plan'* and built upon during the lifetime of the Plan.

13. Better Use of Unoccupied or Old Buildings

We welcome that as part of *'Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness'* and *'Realising our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development'* will review planning legislation to allow the change of use of vacant commercial property or over ground floor premises to residential property. Again, this needs to be reiterated in *'Ireland 2040 Plan'* and legislation be adapted to allow this to happen.

14. Rural Schools

Rural Schools need to be protected. As mentioned above they play a key role in communities and can assist in building sustainable communities. Impact assessments must be carried out in any future proposals to close or amalgamate

schools and the social impact this has on children and their education as well as the local community needs to be considered.

15. School Resources

Both primary and secondary schools need to be adequately resourced and each child should receive and have access to quality education no matter what part of the country they live in. The number of DEIS schools in rural areas is still very low, the threshold for DEIS schools in rural areas should be reviewed. Rural schools can often be disadvantaged due to lack of broadband and all schools should have access to high speed broadband.

Section 4: Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing of people will be an important factor in Ireland 2040 plan. It needs to link in with the overall plan for regional development with some parts of healthcare delivered at community level.

Ageing Population

It is clear Ireland's ageing population is a growing area of concern not only for this Government but also for future policy makers. It is expected that in thirty years the number of people over the age of 65 will double. The ageing population will not only increase financial strain on the countries' finances but also on health and caring services themselves. These services need to be developed and improved upon to meet future demand for healthcare and meet the healthcare needs of an ageing population. For people living in rural areas other services need to be also available, such as a robust public transport system, so they can access such healthcare services. Research indicates that home based caring is the preferred option for many families as well as Government as it is the most cost effective method. This Government has outlined in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, they will improve supports and services for older people to live independently in their own home, this needs to be reiterated in Ireland 2040 Plan.

Meals on Wheels

Meals on Wheels service is a critical component of the continuum of care services and one service available that enables older people to remain living in the community or to return to their own homes after hospitalisation. For those using the service it is seen as more than just a meal. It links people into other services, such as the Public Health Nurse, befriending services and other healthcare services and it can reduce rural isolation. For many, especially men living alone, the person delivering a meal may be the only person they might see in the day or week. However, there are many challenges that are hindering Meals on Wheels delivery the vital service it provides and need to be addressed to ensure older people can remain in their own homes and live independently.

Mental Health Services

Rural Isolation can have a negative impact on a person's mental health. Rural isolation is a particular issue among men, and especially older men, who are living alone and this group can be more susceptible to mental health problems. With the closure of services, such as Post Offices, rural schools, Garda Stations, local pubs over the past few years, many people, mainly older people who live alone, the issue of isolation has increased.

The stigma surrounding mental health and suicide is still very prevalent especially in rural areas and in particular among men. The stigma around asking for help or talking about their problems has not changed in rural areas.

Specialist Health Care

Irish Rural Link welcomes Centre of Excellences for the delivery of specialist healthcare. However, the speed of access to specialist healthcare continues to be an issue and leads to inequalities in terms of income. The two-tier system that occurs for specialist healthcare must be removed. Access must be based on a person's need and not on their ability to pay or if they have private health insurance. People with private health insurance can be fast-tracked to specialist care. With the cost of private health insurance increasing, many people, especially in rural areas can no longer afford to pay this.

People living in rural areas are faced with extra costs when accessing specialist healthcare. People will have to travel to access the specialist healthcare and in some cases may need to accommodation if receiving treatment. These costs are incurred by the patient. There is also the cost of caring, with another person having to travel with the patient.

Quality of Life and Wellbeing

A more balanced development of regions will bring more employment opportunities to each region and towns within each region. At present, people are commuting long distances to work, mainly to the capital, spending a number of hours a day in their car, on a bus or train. More and better employment opportunities available closer to where people live will mean less time commuting to work and less congestion on roads and in cities giving people a better quality of life.

Development of walkways and cycle ways gives people safer options for exercise. The positive relationship between health both physical and mental health, and nature is well researched and acknowledged. 'Realising our Rural Potential' action 187 will explore the potential of new tourism and recreation activities within the context of the National Peatland Strategy⁷. Community Wetlands Forum was set up under the umbrella of Irish Rural Link in 2013.

⁷ Department of Arts Heritage Regional Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2017) *'Realising our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development'* <http://ruralireland.website/>

Community Wetlands Forum

The initiative for the Community Wetlands Forum came from community groups involved in wetland conservation who were developing the idea of wetlands as assets for their communities, as well as work undertaken by Irish Rural Link on behalf of communities affected by the Habitats Directive. By using the tools of community development as a means that the community become engaged in acquiring a greater knowledge of the value of wetlands and can use this to their own benefit. It also means that the community become involved as early as possible and that the necessary local stakeholders are included.

Recommendations

16. Services for Older People: Greater consideration must now be given to what services need to be in place to facilitate an ageing population. The cost of keeping people in their home is less than nursing home care. Also, majority of people would prefer to remain in their own home. As outlined above, Meals on Wheels provides a service that allow people to remain in their home for longer and reduces their stay in hospital, it is more than a meal; connecting people to other health services and reducing loneliness and isolation. Better recognition by Government and HSE of the services Meals on Wheels provides is needed with more funding and resources put in place.

17. Mental Health Services: Better mental health services at community level are needed, especially for people living in rural areas. Full review of 'A Vision for Change' is now needed and any new strategy must be included in Ireland 2040 plan. Awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, especially in rural areas needs to continue to be supported and rolled out.

18. Access to Health Care and Specialist Health Care: Two-tier health system that currently exists needs to be addressed. Ireland 2040 Plan must have as one of its priorities, a health system with equal access for all. The cost of travelling to access specialist health care, especially for those on low income in rural areas must also be addressed. With advancements in healthcare and treatments, a review of what treatments could be provided in local hospitals could be examined to reduce costs for patients.

19. Community Development Officers: IRL recommend that each HSE region would have a dedicated Community Development Officer. A community approach to

healthcare can help to promote better health and wellbeing in a community and ensure that health inequalities are removed and access to healthcare is based on need⁸. Part of the Community Development Officer's role would be to fully engage with all stakeholders in an area to ensure everyone, especially older and other vulnerable groups and those on low incomes have equal access to healthcare and are aware of the health services they are entitled to.

20. Better Quality of Life and Wellbeing: Ireland 2040 Plan must incorporate actions set out in the Action Plan for Rural Development (2017) around tourism and recreation potential and build on these to ensure people will have safe and secure places for leisure. Raising awareness of the value peatlands and wetlands can bring to a community and getting community involved in developing them as a source of recreation is needed.

⁸ HSE 'Community Development Resource Pack'

https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/yourhealthservice/SUI/Library/Guides/Community_Development_Resource_Pack.pdf

Section 5: People with Disabilities –Edited by Disability Federation of Ireland

Disability Federation of Ireland welcome the acknowledgement of the ever-increasing diversity of Irish society in section 2.1.6 of the consultation document. We wholly support the point that “*There will be a need to align development strategies with social strategies, including in relation to the integration of migrant communities and supporting access and opportunity for people with disabilities.*” However, we would propose that the National Planning Framework (“NPF”) – Ireland 2040 Our Plan needs to go further.

Ireland will soon ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), and is currently in the process of implementation. The UN CRPD should therefore be taken into account in designing the new National Planning Framework, to ensure that people with disabilities are fully included in Ireland’s future. The plan hopes to promote development all around Ireland, and to put in place town planning strategies. At all stages of this process and throughout every aspect of the National Planning Framework, accessibility must be taken into account. The key provision relating to Accessibility is Article 9 of the UN CRPD, and it means more than ensuring buildings are wheelchair accessible, although that is an important goal. Accessibility means all people with disabilities have access to the built environment, to transportation, and to information and communication. It means providing public signage in Braille for people with visual impairments, and ensuring publicly posted information is easy to understand for people with intellectual disabilities. It means taking into account all forms of disability when designing a town and city planning strategy. And these are just some few examples. There is also extensive reference made throughout the UN CRPD to the use and role of assistive technologies (Articles 4, 9, 20, 21, 24, 26, 29 and 32) and universal design (Articles 2 and 4) in unlocking so many possibilities for adults and children with disabilities, but they are also key for older people and carers. We urge proper incorporating of and provision for people with disabilities in the National Planning Framework, in line with the UN CRPD to ensure that people with disabilities are treated as equal members of the community, and provided with equal access to services and the environment.

And so, DFI submit that the NPF must also make a clear statement to the affect that: “In particular, development strategies must be aligned with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (“UN CRPD”) and these rights and responsibilities must be woven and identified acknowledging the commitments being made to the UN CRPD, and to do so at the outset of any final text. It would be crucial then to follow this by incorporating and explicitly highlighting disability considerations throughout the entire

NPF, rather than confining mention of disabilities and social inclusion to any one section of the NPF.

In particular (though not exclusively) we would highlight the further need to make explicit reference to disabilities and social inclusion and the corresponding UN CRPD articles, in references to:

- Education; [Article 24 – Education](#)
- Employment; [Article 27 – Work and employment](#)
- Availability of accessible transport, roads/pathways, buildings and facilities; [Article 9 – Accessibility](#) and [Article 20 – Personal mobility](#)
- Enabling participation in the community; [Article 29 – Participation in political and public life](#),
[Article 30 – Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport](#) and [Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community](#),
- Design of housing; [Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community](#)

The full text of the UN CRPD can be viewed at:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>

Conclusion

The new National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040 Our Plan is an opportunity for this Government and subsequent Governments to build an Ireland all people want to live in. The recent growth in the country has mainly been concentrated in the Dublin and Greater Dublin area, with the rest of the country being left behind and all people are not benefiting from this growth. The current housing crisis being experienced in the Dublin and commuter regions are warning signs that more balanced regional growth is needed to reduce the pressure on the capital but also to ensure that every part of the country and every person in the country can experience and have access to the same level of growth and the same opportunities.

No person or part of the country should be left behind in this new National Framework. Rural areas need to start to be included in Government Plans and Strategies. Better employment opportunities need to be created and measures put in place to ensure jobs are created and supported.

All people should have the same opportunities and access to services available to them, whether this is housing, transport, education etc and people should not be excluded because of a disability they may have, are of ethnic minority or vulnerable group or where they live in the country.

Irish Rural Link the Organisation

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 1200 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities' interests.

'Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society'

Irish Rural Link's aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21st century
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.
- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities.

'Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.'

ⁱ Western Development Commission (2016) “WDC Insights: Enterprise Profile of Western Regions”
<http://www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/WDC-Insights-Enterprise-Profile-of-the-Western-Region-Sept-2016-0.3MB.pdf>

ⁱⁱ RTE News.ie 16/06/16 <http://www.rte.ie/news/2016/0616/795937-businesses-web-presence-iedr/>