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Research Report

Developing a framework to monitor rural development policy in Ireland: Opportunities and challenges

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DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK TO MONITOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN IRELAND: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIO	Bio-economy Input-Output
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DECC	Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
Defra	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (UK)
DETE	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DRCDD	Department of Rural and Community Development
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FDI	foreign direct investment
FLAG	Fisheries Local Action Groups
GDP	gross domestic product
gTeic	Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Digital Network)
ICC	Island and coastal communities
KPI	key performance indicator
LAG	local action group
LEO	local enterprise office
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NACE	Nomenclature of Economic Activities
NBI	National Broadband Ireland
NPF	National Planning Framework
NTA	National Transport Authority
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	purchasing power parity
QNHS	Quarterly National Household Survey
RDI	Rural Development Index
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SICAP	Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme
SILC	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
TPI	Thriving Places Index
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
WDC	Western Development Commission
WWCW	What Works Centre for Wellbeing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy evaluation is an essential tool of government as it ensures that the objectives of policies and programmes are being met and that tax revenues are being well spent. In many instances, policy evaluation involves using standard counterfactual analysis to measure the impact of a programme on a well-defined outcome variable, for example, the change in unemployment rates following the introduction of a wage subsidy offered to firms hiring persons on the Live Register. However, in many policy areas with wide-ranging and cross-cutting objectives, standard counterfactual analysis is not possible and policy evaluation takes the form of monitoring changes in key performance indicators (KPIs) that are linked to specific policy objectives or general well-being levels. Given the large-scale budgets associated with rural and community development, it is essential that Ireland's data infrastructure is sufficient to allow for effective policy evaluation in these areas. The purpose of this study is to identify the KPIs most relevant to Irish rural development policy and to assess the extent to which these are currently available at the required spatial level.

This report establishes a framework and identifies a range of potential metrics that the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) might consider adopting in order to monitor the impacts of rural development policies in Ireland. These metrics can be applied in one of two ways:

1. to assess general well-being levels within targeted communities using a range of individual KPIs or indices;
2. to monitor the direct impact of policies on specific target variables within a defined monitoring framework.

Our research approach is based on the Irish government's *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021–2025* (Government of Ireland 2021b). While this policy represents a whole-of-government approach to the evolution and advancement of rural Ireland, the DRCD will coordinate its implementation on behalf of the government. Our Rural Future centres around eight key themes:

1. optimising digital connectivity;
2. supporting employment and careers;
3. revitalising rural towns and villages;
4. enhancing participation, leadership and resilience in rural communities;
5. enhancing public services;
6. transitioning to a climate-neutral society;
7. the sustainability of agriculture, the marine and forestry;
8. the sustainability of the islands and coastal communities.

Under these key themes, the government has set out an initial total of 146 policy measures that it plans to pursue, to achieve nine key deliverables:

1. Remote working (RW)
2. Revitalising rural towns and villages (RTV)
3. Jobs for rural Ireland (RJ)
4. Rural living (RL)
5. Rural Ireland's unique tourism, culture and heritage (TCH)
6. Supporting communities to create their own future (C)
7. Agriculture, the marine and forestry (AMF)
8. Island and coastal communities (ICC)
9. Transitioning to a climate-neutral economy (CNE).¹

Some of the government's planned measures are scheme/fund-based (e.g., 'Invest in roll-out of National Broadband Plan'). Others involve the development and implementation of policies (e.g., 'Implement the National Remote Work Strategy to facilitate employees in working from home, or from co-working spaces, which will support the retention of skilled people in rural areas'). And others are less tangible in nature (e.g., 'Encourage greater use of the Buy and Renew Scheme and the Repair and Lease Scheme to combat vacancy and dereliction').

There is some overlap in the nine key deliverables that the government's 146 measures intend to address, and implementation of the measures are the responsibility of various government departments, state bodies, local authorities

1 There are a further six measures set out under the heading 'Implementation of the Policy', giving 152 in total. Our Rural Future work programmes are designed with the living-document principle in mind, such that new policy measures can be added each year while others can be closed off or removed.

and other institutions. Given this, evaluating each of the 146 Our Rural Future measures was deemed impracticable. Instead, a monitoring approach, based on international best practice, is the best method to identify the effectiveness of Our Rural Future. In this study, we focus specifically on the scheme/fund-based measures that are being implemented under the policy and assess how they could be monitored in an effective, outcome-centric way.

To assist in the development of a monitoring framework, we review the national and international literature relevant to evaluating rural development policy. We also discuss Our Rural Future in detail, paying particular attention to the scheme/fund-based measures that are being delivered as part of this policy and how such measures will contribute to the policy's key deliverables. Some of the policy's scheme/fund-based measures will have a direct impact on key deliverables, while the impact of others will be more indirect.

In identifying the KPIs that could be used to monitor the effectiveness of a rural development policy – in this instance Our Rural Future – attention is paid to the extent to which the identified KPIs are available for particular spatial levels, and the degree to which these can be tied to specific scheme/fund-based measures set out in Our Rural Future. The relevant metrics that are currently being collected by government departments and the Central Statistics Office (CSO), and the degree to which these vary according to geographical area and level, are reviewed.

The report provides guidance around how a KPI framework might best be developed to monitor the impacts of Our Rural Future, specifically in terms of its key deliverables. Based on this work, and the extensive data that are available to monitor rural development, one of the main recommendations from this study is that the development of a Rural Development Index (RDI) be investigated.

A key finding of the study is that the application of a standard urban–rural dichotomy to the development of KPIs is of limited value given that this classification masks a large amount of heterogeneity across areas (Whelan et al., 2023). A more realistic approach would be to develop indicators using the current CSO six-way urban–rural classification, which allows for a much greater level of granularity in monitoring the impact of policies and the measurement of rural well-

being. Currently, only nine of the relevant KPIs identified in this study are available at this spatial level.

It is imperative that efforts are made to achieve a rapid increase in the number of KPIs available under the six-way urban–rural classification, to improve their capacity to effectively monitor the effectiveness of rural policy initiatives in Ireland at both programme level and with respect to indicators of general well-being.

This study has an important role to play in assisting the government and the CSO in developing measures which will better depict the increasingly dynamic rural community in Ireland, how it is developing and evolving over time, and the degree to which the government is achieving its objectives and targets with regards to the development of rural Ireland between 2021 and 2025, and also beyond. Ensuring all government statistics are available at a spatially disaggregated level is key, and enhanced use of the CSO's six-way urban–rural classification is also a key recommendation of this study.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Policy evaluation is an essential tool of government, as it ensures that the objectives of policies and programmes are being met and that tax revenues are being well spent. In many instances, policy evaluation involves using standard counterfactual analysis to measure the impact of a programme on a well-defined outcome variable, for example, the change in unemployment rates following the introduction of a wage subsidy offered to firms hiring persons on the Live Register. However, in many policy areas with wide-ranging and cross-cutting objectives, standard counterfactual analysis is not possible and policy evaluation takes the form of monitoring changes in KPIs which are linked to specific policy objectives and general well-being levels. Given the large-scale budgets associated with rural and community development, it is essential that Ireland's data infrastructure is sufficient to allow for effective policy evaluation in these areas. The purpose of this study is to identify the KPIs most relevant to Irish rural development policy and to assess the extent to which these KPIs are currently available at the required spatial level.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) was established in 2017 with the remit of promoting rural and community development across Ireland and supporting vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities. The programmes, projects and policies devised and implemented by the DRCD cover a broad range of areas, including but not limited to rural development, employment schemes, social inclusion and the supply of amenities and services for communities.

The DRCD's 2021–2023 Statement of Strategy makes a commitment to building capacity to allow for the evaluation of their work and impact, thereby allowing them to capture evidence and to improve future programme development and implementation – as is best practice in policymaking. In its most recent Statement of Strategy (2023–2025), one of the Department's strategic objectives is to continue to build capacity to evaluate the work that the Department undertakes and its impact, so as to foster continuous improvement. In doing this, one of the Department's key actions is to continue to work and collaborate with the ESRI and

other research organisations to inform the ongoing development of its policies and programmes.

This report is the second research output under a programme established in 2019 between the DRCD and the ESRI to assist the DRCD in meeting its goal of increasing capacity to monitor and evaluate its work. The first study (Whelan et al. 2021) identified international best practice with regards to evaluating and monitoring the impacts of rural and community development spending.

In recent years, there has been increased attention paid at the EU and OECD to the importance of rural communities and their development. The OECD's New Rural Paradigm, which was approved by OECD member states in 2006, outlined a conceptual framework that positioned rural policy as an investment strategy to promote competitiveness in rural territories (see OECD, 2006). This was followed in 2018 with the OECD's Rural Policy 3.0, an extension and refinement of its 2006 policy (OECD, 2018b). The 2018 policy identified more specific mechanisms for the implementation of effective rural policies, emphasising the importance of rural regions in member states' ability to capitalise on major global opportunities and rural locations being able to make a significant contribution to national prosperity and well-being.

Ireland has been no exception in acknowledging and emphasising the importance of rural communities in the country's growth and development and in the well-being of its citizens. The government's Our Rural Future policy was designed as an ambitious plan for rural Ireland that not only took advantage of opportunities in rural locations but also mitigated the risks these areas are facing. However, despite the importance of rural development policy in Ireland, there is no framework for how best to monitor and evaluate measures implemented in this area. It is important to note the distinction between monitoring and evaluation in this instance. 'Monitoring' is described by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) as the 'routine process of collecting and recording information in order to track progress towards expected results', while evaluation is seen as 'the systematic assessment of the design, implementation and/or results of a programme, project, activity, policy, strategy or other undertaking' (UNITAR, 2012, p. 17).

While, ideally, we would like to be able to formally evaluate major rural spending initiatives with a view to measuring their counterfactual impacts, and Imbens and Wooldridge (2009) recommend counterfactual analysis for programme or policy evaluation in any area, this is almost impossible to achieve for policies, programmes and projects with a broad remit, as they potentially impact many outcomes that are also likely to be simultaneously impacted by other areas of government policy (e.g., Climate Action Plan, Project Ireland 2040).

Take, for example, policies aimed at regenerating rural towns and villages: one expected outcome of such initiatives might be an increase in levels of job creation or a slowdown of depopulation. However, employment growth may also be simultaneously impacted by national policies in the areas of industrial policy or taxation, while depopulation might be impacted by changes in migration policy or changes in local planning rules. Also, using quantitative indicators to evaluate programmes can be limited by data gaps and an inability to measure the less tangible aspects associated with policy interventions (Yang et al., 2015). For these reasons, the national and international literature provides limited evidence of formal counterfactual assessments of rural policy interventions (Whelan et al., 2021; Castaño et al., 2019).

Castaño et al. (2019) review several counterfactual analyses that examine the impacts of the EU Rural Development Programme and find that while counterfactual analysis is recommended by the EU, it remains lacking in number. Furthermore, they argue that the methodology is not perfect and that aggregating overall effectiveness of rural development programmes remains difficult (Castaño et al., 2019). However, where interventions are associated with more narrowly defined outcomes, it is possible to apply formal econometric techniques to estimate counterfactual impacts, and there do exist some limited examples of this in the international literature (see Gertler et al., 2016). For example, Michalek et al. (2020) use a quasi-experimental approach to examine the impact of the Rural Development Programme on the performance of the food-processing sector in Poland. They also detail the issues with other attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of the Rural Development Programme (Michalek et al., 2020).

Counterfactual analysis is more common in agricultural policy evaluation (Colen et al., 2016) due to the narrower outcomes to be examined as compared to the broad outcomes associated with a sweeping rural policy framework such as Our Rural Future. In work evaluating large-scale policy interventions, Becker et al. (2010) utilise a regression discontinuity design to examine the impact of the EU Structural Fund on regional GDP. This methodology, however, relies wholly on there being a distinct cut-off between the treated and the untreated. In this case, the treated are those regions with a GDP per capita adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of 75 per cent or less than the EU average. Such a methodology would not work with Our Rural Future given the urban–rural continuum that exists, with no clear cut-off between urban areas (the untreated) and rural areas (the treated), and given the plethora of interventions within the far-reaching rural policy. In fact, within such a rural policy, some interventions may impact urban areas indirectly while others may impact only the most rural of areas.

Due to the issues associated with quantitatively evaluating rural policies with a broad remit, the literature argues for a triangulation approach to be taken whereby economic techniques, stakeholder analysis and qualitative interviews are all used to better understand how policies are meeting their goals and objectives (Yang et al., 2015). Such an approach is also advised by the European Commission (2015).

Whelan et al. (2021) examine the extent of evaluation and monitoring of rural development interventions in Ireland and find limited evidence of formal evaluation studies. The most significant study to date relates to a mid-term evaluation of Ireland’s Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 (Indecon, 2019). The Rural Development Programme was a component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and had a budget of €4 billion for 2014–2020, €2.2 billion of which was provided by the EU.

The Rural Development Programme had six priority areas.² In their evaluation, Indecon (2019) adopted a number of methodologies, including:

2 These were (1) knowledge transfer and innovation; (2) farm viability and competitiveness; (3) food-chain organisation and risk management; (4) restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems; (5) resource-efficient, climate-resilient economy; and (6) social inclusion and economic development.

- qualitative information collected through case studies and consultations;
- the collection of survey data;
- counterfactual econometric models;
- indicator analysis.

Indecon also made use of the Bio-Economy Input-Output (BIO) model, developed by Teagasc, University of Galway and Marine Institute Ireland, to estimate the counterfactual impact of the Rural Development Programme. Using this model, they found that programme expenditure generated 4,881 jobs nationally, of which 4,178 were created in rural areas. The BIO model was also used to produce a range of sectoral multipliers that allowed for the total impacts of project expenditure to be estimated. Using the multipliers, Indecon estimated that the overall impact of the Rural Development Programme over the period 2014–2018 was €4.24 billion (2019). The review also found that the Rural Development Programme increased income in rural areas, boosted employment and reduced poverty, as well as created benefits ecologically and in terms of biodiversity.

Evaluation and reporting requirements are also required by the LEADER programme, a multi-annual programme for rural development that is co-funded by the EU through the CAP. LEADER is a sub-component of the Rural Development Programme, which adds to national capacity in this area. For 2014–2020, the LEADER programme had a budget of €250 million in grant supports for rural communities and businesses. A similar level of funding is available for 2021–2027. The DRCD is the delegated paying agent and has overall responsibility for the implementation of the LEADER programme.

The LEADER programme's project impacts are assessed through the use of common indicators which are collected across all EU member states. Performance and monitoring data are collected through a bespoke software system, within which the primary objective of each project must be selected from a pre-populated list of objectives.

A number of programme guidelines aid effective monitoring of projects funded under LEADER. For example, before the start of any project, the anticipated outcomes must be outlined; then, at the end of the project, data are collected that reflect the objectives. Examples of end-of-project outcomes collected include:

1. the number of jobs created;
2. the number of people trained and the duration of any training;
3. the number of people in disadvantaged or hard-to-reach communities benefiting from the projects or accessing services;
4. the number of visitors to tourism projects.

In their assessment of rural monitoring and evaluation, in addition to the BIO model for formal evaluations, Whelan et al. (2021) point to the potential for a greater use of official statistics when monitoring and evaluating rural projects. In particular, they highlight the potential of a 2018 initiative by the CSO that developed a six-way urban–rural categorisation of Ireland (Whelan et al., 2021). Urban areas were subdivided into three categories: cities, satellite urban towns and independent urban towns. This was undertaken on the basis of the proportion of people in employment in cities. Rural areas were also subdivided into three categories: rural areas with high urban influence, rural areas with moderate urban influence and highly rural or remote areas. This rural classification was based on the proportion of usual residents in employment in urban areas. Whelan et al. (2021) argue that incorporating such information into evaluation and monitoring procedures measures is likely to represent an important development.

In summary, given that rural development will not be determined by rural policy alone but will be driven by a combination of government departments’ and agencies’ policies, it is not feasible to formally evaluate the government’s Our Rural Future policy. Therefore, based on the international literature (see Chapter 2), the best and most common approach to take is monitoring. It is through this lens that we identify the potential KPIs that could be used to assist in monitoring the key deliverables set out in Our Rural Future (see Chapter 4). We then assess the degree to which such KPIs are either available, or tendentially available, to Irish policymakers.

CHAPTER 2

Monitoring rural development

2.1 CONTEXT

In recent years, there has been a considerable effort globally to move away from traditional economic measures of well-being such as economic growth. The reasons behind this are twofold. First, it has long been recognised that economic indicators alone are not a good proxy for well-being: ‘the welfare of a nation can, therefore, scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income’ (Kuznets, 1934, p. 7). This is particularly the case in Ireland, where foreign direct investment (FDI) is known to distort some of the national economic measures of growth, particularly GDP per capita (Government of Ireland, 2021a). Second, current economic measures do not take into account sustainable well-being, which is whether or not current well-being will impact the well-being of future generations (Arrow et al., 2012). To mitigate the first issue, more holistic measures of well-being are needed, and this has been reflected in policy in many countries in recent years. To mitigate the second issue, future as well as current well-being needs to be considered for a comprehensive and sustainable approach, as per the OECD’s Framework for Measuring Well-Being and Progress.³

When it comes to rural policy, much of the existing focus relates to the general well-being of rural communities, with a limited focus on the most appropriate means of monitoring rural policy interventions. This is in line with other areas of policy intervention with a spatial dimension. For example, Whelan et al. (2019) discuss the motivations behind a lack of best practice for evaluating and monitoring community development interventions. Given the plethora of place-based policies, with multiple programmes and projects impacting an area at a single point in time, it becomes very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of any single policy intervention. On this basis, there has been a move in recent years towards measuring overall well-being within rural areas, whether that is personal well-being, community well-being or a combination of the two.

Personal well-being is defined by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing as ‘how satisfied we are with our lives, our sense that what we do in life is worthwhile, our day-to-day emotional experiences (happiness and anxiety), and our wider mental wellbeing’.⁴ Community well-being is seen as the ‘combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential’ (Wiseman and Brasher, 2008, p. 358). We discuss several key examples of monitoring approaches to place-based well-being in the next section.

It is worth noting that in January 2023, the Irish government published proposals for a rural proofing model for Ireland (DRCD, 2023). Our Rural Future makes a commitment to the development of a rural proofing model, to ensure that the needs of rural areas are considered in all policymaking. More specifically, the policy states,

Rural proofing aims to ensure that government policies show an understanding of, and take into account, the specific characteristics and challenges of rural areas. It seeks to anticipate the potential impacts of government policy interventions and to ensure fair and equitable policy outcomes for rural areas. For rural proofing to work effectively, all government departments will need to make the impact on rural communities of proposed policy initiatives a routine policy consideration.

(Government of Ireland, 2021b, p. 94)

Commitments to rural proofing in Ireland emerged initially in 1999, but, in practice, having effective rural proofing has proved difficult.

2.2 MONITORING RURAL WELL-BEING

2.2.1 The Rural Well-being Framework

It is recognised that well-being is complex and that, while the factors that impact well-being will not be unique in rural areas, they will differ to some degree from urban areas. Given this, the Rural Well-being Framework was commissioned by the

4

See

<https://whatworkswellbeing.wordpress.com/wellbeing-2/#:~:text=Personal%20wellbeing%20is%20a%20particularly,and%20our%20wider%20mental%20wellbeing.>

UK government's Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and developed by the Centre for Thriving Places. The Framework was developed with input from residents of rural areas. Specifically, eight workshops were conducted with individuals from a variety of rural communities.

Compared to past ways of measuring well-being, this framework takes a much more holistic approach. Economic opportunities, community, environment and health are all domains of the Rural Well-being Framework, and these are viewed through the lenses of access and equality, with access deemed as being critical for enabling well-being in rural areas. Not only does the Framework set out how to measure rural well-being but it also provides guidance on well-being evaluation. The Centre for Thriving Places recommends using a 'data tool' alongside the framework to allow for monitoring, suggesting that this take the form of an online indicator bank or a composite index which would allow for wider use. They make some suggestions as to the indicators that may be useful. These suggestions were gathered from trustworthy available data sources, updated regularly and recently, and were available at a fine spatially disaggregated level.

Suggested indicators covered a range of areas including life expectancy, disability prevalence, mental health, poverty, education, jobs, social capital, pollution and housing quality. Access, equality and sustainability were also included as important indicators for monitoring rural well-being. A list of missing indicators is also provided: these are indicators which could be used to monitor rural well-being but which are not available at a suitable level of geographic disaggregation at this time. Increased collaboration with the statistical agency in the UK is also recommended to ensure the gathering of 'rural relevant data'.

2.2.2 The Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the first Rural Policy Framework was developed by the Northern Ireland Executive and took effect in March 2022 (Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, 2022). This follows the introduction of mandatory rural proofing for all government departments in 2002. In line with other countries, one aspect of the Rural Policy Framework was that there would be investment in generating and creating metrics and baselines that would allow for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of implemented policies. The framework

also included the introduction of an oversight committee to monitor progress. This committee would ensure that key stakeholders from rural communities remained engaged within the policymaking and monitoring process. This decision was influenced by the experiences of the LEADER programme, where the bottom-up approach and the contribution of local action groups were seen as key to the success of the programme.

With regards to monitoring and reporting, one of the Year 1 aims of the project was to develop indicators to allow for the monitoring of the framework's effectiveness. Obviously, some indicators would be associated with particular policy interventions while others would involve cross-cutting and be related to a range of interventions. Since the framework was published, in 2022, there has been little follow-up, which is more than likely due to the ongoing political stalemate at Stormont. This means that there is a lack of publicly available information from which to learn, but there may still be opportunities for learning between the relevant Northern Ireland and Irish departments responsible for rural policy.

2.2.3 Rural proofing

In England, there is no specific rural policy. Instead, since 2000, all government departments are supposed to rural-proof their policymaking. Rural proofing is described by the UK government as 'about understanding the impacts of policies in rural areas. It ensures that these areas receive fair and equitable policy outcomes' (Defra, 2017, p. 4). Rural proofing was introduced in England in 2000 following a White Paper on rural development, 'Our Countryside: The Future – A Fair Deal for Rural England' which committed an additional £1 billion funding for rural policies (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000). This White Paper included a host of new rural policies, but rural proofing is the only one to remain, although it now operates in a more 'limited and less accountable form' (Select Committee on the Rural Economy, 2019).

Recognising potential impacts is a key part of rural proofing. This is done through engagement with stakeholders as well as monitoring and evaluating. Monitoring and evaluation are based around data availability:

collecting good quality and relevant monitoring data alongside well-designed research methods will enable an evaluation of the rural impacts and provide an understanding of the success of delivery mechanisms. This will be an important source of learning which could be useful when amending the policy or for implementing other policies in the future.

(Defra, 2017, p. 17)

Despite these claims, the authors maintain that it is extremely difficult to evaluate a single policy intervention that is one of a range of policy interventions occurring to large areas at one time. To support rural proofing, a ‘rural evidence hub’ is available online that hosts a range of data which could be used to monitor rural policy interventions. This includes a set of rural economy statistical indicators (businesses, earnings, innovation, investment, productivity, etc.); rural living statistical indicators (broadband, crime, education, poverty, health, accessibility, etc.); Census analyses of rural areas, the statistical digest of rural England and the Rural Economic Bulletin (Defra, 2017).

The UK data splits out urban and rural areas and does not account for the heterogeneity that exists within rural areas. The rural evidence hub, while providing a significant amount of useful information, is not aggregated into one online dashboard like the CSO Well-being Hub (see CSO, 2022). In fact, building the six-way urban–rural classification into the existing CSO Well-being Hub would be extremely useful in monitoring rural progress.

2.2.4 Rural Well-being: Geography of Opportunities

The OECD proposes taking a ‘multi-dimensional approach’ to rural well-being, with the first dimension being a commitment to look beyond the standard economic measures, e.g., productivity or income, and to ‘expand the frame of analysis to include the environmental and social dimensions of well-being delivering a more holistic, people-centred understanding of regional inequalities and rural development’ (OECD, 2020, p. 5). This update of the OECD’s rural development framework takes a more holistic approach with regards to monitoring and evaluating and stresses the importance of moving away from the economic approach. The importance of engaging with stakeholders is a key component: ‘to ensure sustainability and local ownership of rural policies, governments need to

better implement multi-stakeholder engagement and a “bottom-up approach” (OECD, 2020, p. 15).

The OECD’s framework sets out to develop outcomes indicators to assist with the assessment and benchmarking of rural well-being. However, given the issues which can arise about data confidentiality in small-area analysis, it is recommended that innovative methods of data collection are explored to overcome this (OECD, 2019).

2.2.5 Rural Development Index

Michalek and Zarnekow developed a composite RDI to measure the ‘overall level of rural development and quality of life in individual rural regions of a given EU country’ (2012, p. 65). They argue that the index can be used both to measure overall rural development and to evaluate the impacts of rural development programmes. A composite approach is taken with this RDI to ensure the multidimensional concepts that make up rural development are considered. The RDI has six key domains, with each domain containing a range of indicators.

1. Economic
2. Social
3. Environment
4. Demographics
5. Administration
6. Infrastructure.

Given the amount of data now available in most countries, Michalek and Zarnekow used data-reduction techniques within these areas. Specifically, principal component analysis was used to reduce 337 variables for the Slovak regions into 21 factors of rural development. In Poland, 991 variables were reduced into 17 factors. These factors were then weighted to generate an RDI. The variables used ranged from income and housing availability to pollution and work hazards. The weight placed on certain variables is data-driven, and, as such, different regions have different variables that drive the outcome of any composite index. It is thought that such an index could be generated for most EU countries.

2.3 EXAMPLES OF MONITORING PLACE-BASED WELL-BEING

While not necessarily used for monitoring well-being in rural areas, there are other tools and frameworks which have been developed specifically for monitoring place-based well-being. The same trends found in the tools and frameworks mentioned in the previous section are also found for the place-based well-being tools and frameworks. The emphasis is placed on holistic well-being over traditional economic well-being, given the known caveats with the latter. While these place-based tools are not focused specifically on rural areas, the key learnings from them would still apply and may also allow for comparability with non-rural areas.

2.3.1 The Thriving Places Index

The Thriving Places Index (TPI) was developed by the Centre for Thriving Places to account for the lack of holistic, rounded well-being measures amid the growing belief that traditional economic indicators were not good proxies for measuring well-being. The index ‘identifies the local conditions for well-being and measures whether those conditions are being delivered fairly and sustainably’ (Centre for Thriving Places, 2022a). The indicators used are extensive, falling under three main categories:

1. Local conditions
2. Equality
3. Sustainability.⁵

Central to the TPI is the recognition that a holistic approach is necessary. For example, jobs and employment on their own are not beneficial for society unless they are what could be considered ‘good work’. The TPI, rather than just measuring incomes or the unemployment rate, examines whether people are earning a living wage, whether they have job security and whether they are working more or less hours than they want to (Centre for Thriving Places, 2019b).

The Index has been developed for both England and Wales and has been used to look at well-being across the countries. It has also been used at a more local level, e.g., the Wellbeing Framework for the North of Tyne (North of Tyne Combined

5 For the list of indicators included in the Thriving Places Index, see www.thrivingplacesindex.org/docs/TPI_2021_Indicator_List.pdf

Authority, 2021). The Centre for Thriving Places was also commissioned by the UK's Defra (see above, Section 2.2.1), who acknowledged a dearth of data to account for the influence of rurality on individual and community well-being which could then also be used to improve rural policymaking. This Rural Wellbeing Framework, while including core domains of well-being such as housing, also included rural-specific factors such as the impact of seasonality on jobs, services and housing. Access also came through as hugely important in rural areas; this means access to services, employment opportunities, etc.

All of these factors could be replicated in Ireland by using the CSO six-way urban-rural classification with existing CSO and departmental datasets. However, the Rural Wellbeing Framework is not considered a completed product: the Centre for Thriving Places acknowledges considerable data gaps exist that hinder its usefulness.

2.3.2 Happiness Pulse

The Happiness Pulse was also developed by the Centre for Thriving Places. A five-minute online survey, it 'measures the detailed reality of individual well-being. It gets to the heart of how people feel and function in their lives, work, and communities' (Centre for Thriving Places, 2022b). The survey asks individuals questions on three general well-being domains based on:

1. how they feel about their life;
2. what they do to support a better life;
3. how they relate to others.

Again, a more holistic approach is deemed to be superior to traditional well-being measures. Use of the Happiness Pulse is on a smaller scale and appears to have been for more niche projects such as 'Measuring, understanding and improving well-being at the Royal West of England Academy' (Centre for Thriving Places, 2019a).

While it would be a large task to roll out an online survey to all rural dwellers in Ireland, it could be used to track the well-being of a subsample of rural dwellers over time. There would be issues here associated with internet usage and including

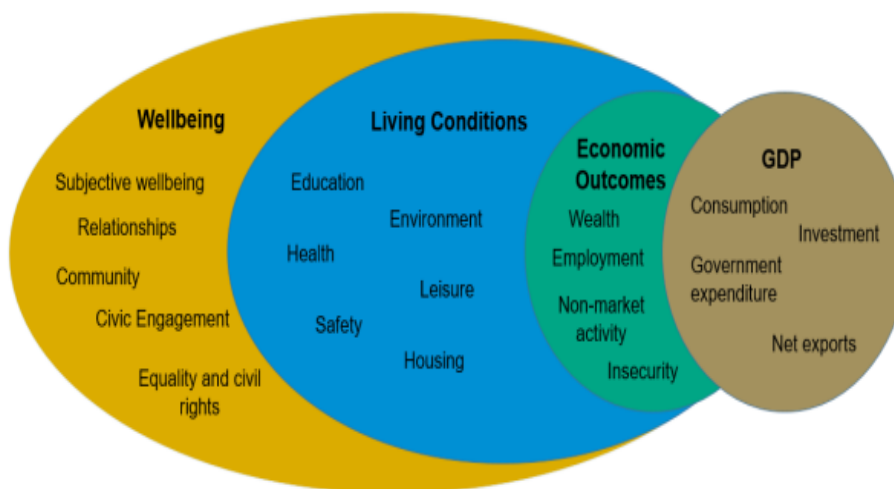
older people, but if it was done over time, movements in the trends would still be of interest.

2.4 MONITORING WELL-BEING IN IRELAND

One commitment in the Irish government’s 2020 Programme for Government was to develop new measures of well-being and progress (Government of Ireland, 2020). This was based on an awareness that traditional economic measures did not account for several key components, such as the environment, voluntary work, equality of opportunity, wealth inequality and income inequality.

The 2020 Programme for Government set out to introduce a broad range of indicators, ‘a set of wellbeing indices to create a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is faring’, which could complement existing economic indicators (Government of Ireland 2020; see Fig. 2.1).

FIGURE 2.1 WELL-BEING COMPONENTS IN THE IRISH GOVERNMENT’S 2020 PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT



Source: Department of Finance and Deutsche Bank.

As part of the move towards a more holistic approach to well-being in Ireland, the Well-being Information Hub was introduced in October 2021 by the CSO, based on an international framework developed by the OECD. The themes of this hub are:

1. Subjective well-being;
2. Physical and mental health;

3. Income and wealth;
4. Knowledge, skills and innovation;
5. Housing and built environment;
6. Environment, climate and biodiversity;
7. Safety and security;
8. Work and job quality;
9. Time use;
10. Connections, community and participation;
11. Civic engagement, trust and cultural expression.

This hub does not assess current and future well-being separately. However, some indicators are marked as a 'sustainable well-being indicator', where sustainable well-being suggests that current living standards can be maintained into the future.

The CSO produced a list of indicators across the aforementioned 11 domains, using CSO and government department data (CSO, 2022; see box).

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Subjective well-being |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Population rating their overall life satisfaction as high ii. Population who did not feel depressed or downhearted in the past four weeks iii. School-age children who reported being happy with their life at present |
| 2. | Mental and physical health |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Healthy life years* ii. Population reporting depression* iii. Unmet need for medical attention |
| 3. | Income and wealth |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Median real household income ii. Median household net wealth* iii. Households making ends meet with great difficulty iv. Net government worth* |
| 4. | Knowledge, skills and innovation |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Reading and Maths performance in 15-year-olds* |

- ii. Lifelong learning rate
 - iii. Research and development personnel*
5. Housing and built environment
- i. New dwelling completions*
 - ii. A or B domestic energy rating*
 - iii. Average distance to everyday services*
 - iv. At risk of poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest
6. Environment, climate and biodiversity
- i. Pollution, grime or other environmental problems
 - ii. Water bodies assessed as high or good*
 - iii. Greenhouse gas emissions*
 - iv. Waste to landfill*
7. Safety and security
- i. Murder rate per 100,000 population
 - ii. Persons killed or injured on roads
 - iii. Population who worry they could be a victim of crime
8. Work and job quality
- i. Labour underutilisation rate*
 - ii. Employment rate
 - iii. Mean weekly earnings
9. Time use
- i. Long working hours in main job
 - ii. Carers providing at least 20 hours care per week
 - iii. Population satisfied with time use
10. Connections, community and participation
- i. Population who feel lonely
 - ii. Population with at least two people they are close enough to count on if they had a serious problem

11. Civic engagement, trust and cultural expression

- i. Persons who experienced discrimination in the previous two years
- ii. Satisfaction with how democracy works in Ireland*
- iii. Perceived social inclusion*

Note: * Sustainable Indicator. 'A number of Well-being Indicators in this Information Hub have been identified as Sustainable. The performance of these Well-being Indicators provide some context on whether Ireland's well-being is sustainable. Sustainable well-being suggests living standards can be maintained into the future at current level of well-being at a minimum' (CSO, 2022).

Comparisons are made over time, with the time periods used varying according to data availability. For some of the Well-being Information Hub indicators, comparisons were made with other countries. Differences by age, gender and self-perceived health status were also examined. For example, with regards to subjective well-being, the CSO found that in 2018 a higher percentage of individuals aged 16 and over in Ireland rated their overall life satisfaction as high compared to the EU: 44 per cent compared to 25 per cent. They also found that life satisfaction improved in Ireland between 2013 and 2018, and it did so across all age groups and self-perceived health-status groups.

CHAPTER 3

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021–2025

3.1 OVERVIEW

Our Rural Future is a whole-of-government policy for the economic and social development of rural Ireland over the five-year period between 2021 and 2025. The policy builds on the previous policy that covered the period 2017–2019, Action Plan for Rural Development 2017–2019 (Government of Ireland, 2017). The current policy aims to address existing challenges that rural communities face (e.g., investment, job creation, sustainable population growth, access to services, broadband connectivity, balanced regional development), along with identifying opportunities that they can benefit from in the future (e.g., roll-out of high-speed broadband, transition to a carbon-neutral economy).

Compared to the previous policy, the government is advocating a more strategic and holistic place-based approach with the current policy so that each community can develop an individualised strategy that meets the needs of their local area. This place-based approach is an important component of Our Rural Future given the variation in the characteristics of rural areas (some being adjacent to large urban centres while others are in more remote areas or the offshore islands) and, following on from that, the challenges and opportunities each rural community faces.

In the present policy, the government also acknowledges that there is an interdependence between rural and urban areas in jointly creating Ireland's future. In addition, the policy puts a particular focus on supporting young people in rural communities, given the key contribution they can make in their local economy, including contributing to the development of future initiatives and policies for rural Ireland. Our Rural Future also acknowledges the needs of older people, the value of intergenerational initiatives within rural communities to support the transfer of knowledge, skills and heritage between different age groups, and the opportunity for young people to assist older age cohorts to adapt to digital technologies.

Our Rural Future complements other government initiatives, including the Programme for Government: Our Shared Future (Government of Ireland, 2020). The 2020 Programme for Government places a strong emphasis on rural development given that a significant proportion of Ireland's population, workforce and economic activity is located in rural areas. Some of the commitments in the most recent programme include:

1. the development of town centres and transport services to connect rural communities;
2. support for outdoor tourism initiatives;
3. the development of the circular economy;
4. a just transition to a climate-neutral society;
5. broadband roll-out;
6. maximising the potential of the marine sector;
7. supports for farming and farm families.

Our Rural Future will facilitate a coordinated approach across the government to the delivery of these Programme for Government commitments in rural Ireland.

Our Rural Future also complements Project Ireland 2040, the Climate Action Plan, the National Broadband Plan, Food Vision 2030 and Ireland's alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶ The present policy emphasises the relevance of these other initiatives to the development of rural areas. It also reflects the reform of the CAP, the increased prevalence of remote working and the

6 Ireland implemented its first SDG National Implementation Plan in March 2018, with the ambition of fully achieving the SDGs in Ireland by 2030. As with Our Rural Future, it adopts a whole-of-government approach to its implementation. The National Planning Framework (January 2019) and the National Development Plan 2021–2030 (October 2021) combine to form Project Ireland 2040. The former sets out a spatial strategy for the development of Ireland until 2040, taking account that the population is expected to grow by 1 million over this time period, and the latter sets out the investment to implement the National Planning Framework strategy. One of the objectives of Project Ireland 2040 is to strengthen rural economies and communities. It also has other objectives that will support rural economies and communities (e.g., enhanced regional accessibility, a strong economy supported by enterprise, innovation and skills). One of the funds established by the National Development Plan is the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund: this fund commits to providing an additional €1 billion to support the development of rural Ireland between 2019 and 2027. Project Ireland 2040 defines rural areas as settlements with a population of less than 10,000 people outside of the metropolitan catchment of a city. The CSO define rural areas as having a population with less than 1,500 people.

development of the country’s offshore islands. In addition, the policy is aligned with EU and OECD thinking on rural development.⁷

The context to Our Rural Future and its implementation is one where Ireland and its local communities is recovering from the impact of COVID-19, new ways of working, the effects of Brexit and the transition to a carbon-neutral society, which Ireland is legally bound to achieve no later than 2050. Other factors that are impacting rural communities, or will in the future, include:

1. an ageing population in very rural/remote areas and high dependency ratios;
2. access to public services and transport;
3. broadband connectivity;
4. the availability and appropriateness of adequate community facilities for all age groups;
5. the future of farming.

Our Rural Future sees these issues as giving Ireland an opportunity to achieve balanced regional and rural development, especially the move to remote working. Its goal is to make rural Ireland a thriving location where people are able to (and want to) live, work and do business. Rural Ireland has a central role to play in the country’s national economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being, sustainability and development, especially given that it is expected there will be approximately 1 million additional people living in Ireland by 2040.⁸

The eight thematic objectives of Our Rural Future are:

1. to optimise the opportunities for rural communities from high-speed broadband;
2. to support improved quality employment and career opportunities in rural areas;

7 See OECD (2018b). Also, the EU’s European Green Deal, the European Pillar on Social Rights, the EU Rural Pact and the OECD Cavan Roadmap.

8 Project Ireland 2040 was published in 2018. With the war in Ukraine and the number of individuals arriving in Ireland seeking refuge from this war, the number of additional people living in Ireland by 2040 may surpass this estimate of 1 million.

3. to assist the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages;
4. to enhance the participation, leadership and resilience of rural communities;
5. to enhance public services in rural areas;
6. to support a just transition to a climate-neutral economy;
7. to support the sustainability of agriculture, the marine and forestry;
8. to support the sustainability of our island and coastal communities.

To achieve these objectives, Our Rural Future sets out an initial 146 measures that will be delivered by all government departments (at national, regional and local level), state agencies and local authorities between 2021 and 2025.⁹ The involvement of regional and local government structures in the implementation of the policy will be through their regional spatial and economic strategies, county development plans, local economic and community plans and local-authority climate-action plans.

The 146 measures set out in Our Rural Future are being implemented not only to develop rural communities but also to assist rural locations to maximise the opportunities provided by improved digital connectivity, town-centre regeneration, and the transition to a climate-neutral economy. Implementation of the policy, which is being coordinated by the DRCD, will be overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Investment, which is chaired by the Taoiseach.

3.2 OUR RURAL FUTURE'S SCHEMES/FUNDS AND KEY DELIVERABLES

There are nine key deliverables in Our Rural Future, which the policy's initial 146 measures aim to achieve.¹⁰

1. Remote working (RW)
2. Revitalising rural towns and villages (RTV)
3. Jobs for rural Ireland (RJ)
4. Rural living (RL)

⁹ Additional measures are added to Our Rural Future each year (see footnote 1).

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 in Government of Ireland (2021b).

5. Rural Ireland’s unique tourism, culture and heritage (TCH)
6. Supporting communities to create their own future (C)
7. Agriculture, the marine and forestry (AMF)
8. Island and coastal communities (ICC)
9. Transitioning to a climate-neutral economy (CNE)

In Table 3.1, we identify the main scheme/fund-based of the 146 measures, with the intention of developing a framework to monitor their effectiveness in achieving Our Rural Future’s nine key deliverables (see Chapter 4). We focus specifically on the policy’s scheme/fund-based measures because, compared to the other specified measures, scheme/fund-based measures are tangible, as well as involve considerable financial investment. For this reason, their effectiveness is more amenable to being measured.

For each key deliverable, we have allocated a direct (D) or indirect (I) impact. In Chapter 4, we set out the KPIs that could potentially be used to identify the effectiveness of these measures in achieving the nine key deliverables of Our Rural Future. What is obvious from Table 3.1 is that key deliverables are likely to be simultaneously impacted, either directly or indirectly, by multiple schemes; this reinforces the point that monitoring overall progress in achieving each key deliverable represents an optimal approach given the impossibility of separating out the impacts of individual schemes on each deliverable.

Based on the information presented in the final column in Table 3.1, we can see that the schemes likely to have the widest¹¹ impact on key deliverables include:

1. rolling out the National Broadband Plan;
2. implementing the €70 million Transitional LEADER Programme for community-led rural development and developing and delivering a new LEADER programme to commence in 2023;
3. expanding the provision of free-to-use wireless internet connectivity in rural areas through the roll-out of broadband connection points and other initiatives (e.g., WiFi4EU public Wi-Fi networks);

11 A project is defined as having a ‘wide’ impact if it effects four or more key deliverables, while a project is identified as having a ‘narrow’ impact if it effects three or fewer key deliverables.

4. delivering a suite of new measures to support the development of social enterprises in rural areas;
5. further developing the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ireland's Ancient East as regional tourism offerings;
6. funding local authorities to adapt and improve outdoor public spaces for cultural events and activities all year round;
7. delivering major regeneration projects in towns with a population of over 10,000;
8. delivering expanded Local Link services and further integrating Local Link services with other existing public-transport services through the roll-out of the National Transport Authority (NTA) Connecting Ireland Plan;
9. investing in high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure specifically targeted at towns and villages across the country;
10. developing Gaeltacht service towns situated in or adjacent to Gaeltacht language planning areas;
11. expanding the Sustainable Energy Communities Network from 500 to 1,500 by 2030;
12. retrofitting 500,000 homes and installing 400,000 heat pumps across the country by 2030;
13. bringing investment and job opportunities to coastal communities by developing the offshore renewable-energy sector through the development of an offshore transmission grid;
14. rehabilitating peatlands to contribute to reduced carbon emissions, carbon sequestration and enhanced biodiversity through repurposing 80,000 acres of bog in the Midlands as part of a major peatlands restoration plan and through the national raised bog designated sites restoration programme to restore in the region of 25,000 hectares of raised bog;
15. progressing vital infrastructure development for our island communities;
16. establishing gTeic Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Digital Network) enterprise hubs on the islands;¹²

12 The gTeic digital network is currently made up of 31 digital hubs located in the Gaeltacht regions.

17. continuing to invest in coastal communities through the Fisheries Local Area Group (FLAG) scheme, providing support for investments by micro seafood enterprises and projects in the area of marine tourism and leisure and the wider marine sector.

Schemes that will have a narrower impact on the key deliverables in the current rural development policy include:

1. upgrading school broadband connectivity, including within state-intervention areas;
2. providing grants to retail businesses in rural towns and villages to establish an online presence;
3. rolling out a Local Community Safety Partnership pilot in a rural location;
4. piloting a results-based agri-environment scheme to reward farmers for adapting to more sustainable methods of farming.

TABLE 3.1 PROJECTED IMPACT OF PLANNED SCHEMES/FUNDS ON NINE KEY DELIVERABLES OF OUR RURAL FUTURE

Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE	
I. Optimising digital connectivity													
1.	Invest in roll-out of National Broadband Plan	National Broadband Ireland (NBI) (contract with Department of Environment, Climate and Communications [DECC])	Retail service providers	Invest up to €2.7 billion	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	
2.	Establish an integrated national network of 400 RW hubs, with shared back-office services and a central booking platform	DRCD, Western Development Commission (WDC)	Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, local authorities and other hub providers		D	I	D	I	-	-	-	D	I
3.	Invest in RW facilities to support the retention of skilled people in rural communities and attract mobile talent	DRCD	DECC, relevant departments and agencies		D	I	D	I	-	-	-	D	I
4.	Provide financial support to local authorities to bring vacant properties in town centres back into use as RW hubs	DRCD			D	I	D	I	-	-	-	-	I
5.	Pilot co-working/hot-desking for civil servants in a small number of towns	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform			D	I	D	I	-	-	-	-	I
6.	Provide grants to retail businesses in rural towns and villages to establish an online presence	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), local enterprise offices (LEOs)			-	D	D	I	-	-	-	-	-

Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE
7. Expand the provision of free-to-use wireless internet connectivity in rural areas through the roll-out of broadband connection points and other initiatives (e.g., WiFi4EU public Wi-Fi networks and the Digital Innovation Programme)	DRCD	Local authorities, NBI		D	D	–	D	D	–	–	–	–
8. Upgrade schools' broadband connectivity, including within state intervention areas	Department of Education	NBI, DECC		–	–	–	I	–	–	–	–	–
9. Upgrade and reskill workers in sectors undergoing transformational technological change	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)	SOLAS, Skillnet		–	–	D	I	I	–	I	I	D
II. Supporting employment and careers in rural areas												
1. Deliver 19 advanced technology buildings in regional locations	IDA Ireland	DETE		–	I	D	I	–	–	–	–	D
2. Roll out the development of the technological university model to help support regional growth through the education and training sector	DFHERIS	Institutes of Technology	€90 million was provided in 2019–2022 under the Technological Universities Transformation Fund	–	I	I	I	–	I	–	–	I

	Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE
3.	Deliver a suite of new measures to support the development of social enterprises in rural areas to increase their social, economic and environmental impact and contribute to job creation	DRCD	Social enterprise stakeholders		–	I	D	I	D	D	–	–	I
4.	Further develop the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ireland's Ancient East as regional tourism offerings	Fáilte Ireland	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, local authorities, other relevant stakeholders		–	I	D	I	D	–	–	D	I
5.	Invest in greenways, blueways, walking trails and other outdoor recreation infrastructure to support the growth in outdoor recreational tourism	DRCD, Department of Transport	Fáilte Ireland, local authorities, local development companies, Sport Ireland	The government has committed to investing €1.8 billion in walking and cycling over its period in office	–	I	I	I	D	–	–	D	I
6.	Develop a pilot bicycle upcycling initiative to support employment creation, to harness the potential of investment in greenways and to support the development of the social enterprise business model	DRCD			–	I	D	I	I	I	–	I	I
7.	Expand the Walks Scheme to achieve a target of at least 80 trails	DRCD	Local development companies, local authorities, Sport Ireland		–	I	D	I	D	–	–	I	I

Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE	
III. Revitalising rural towns and villages													
1.	Deliver a range of strategic investment programmes that meet the needs of differentiated rural areas, including through the €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and an enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme	DRCD	Relevant departments, state agencies, local authorities	€1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund	–	D	I	D	I	–	–	–	–
2.	Provide funding to support the upgrade and enhancement of shopfronts and street façades in towns and villages	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), DRCD			–	D	–	D	I	–	–	–	–
3.	Fund local authorities to adapt and improve outdoor public spaces for cultural events and activities all year round	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media			–	D	I	D	D	–	–	–	–
4.	Deliver major regeneration projects in towns with a population of over 10,000 which play an important role as key hubs in rural areas	DHLGH		Urban Regeneration and Development Fund	–	D	D	D	I	–	–	–	–
5.	Provide seed capital to local authorities to provide serviced sites at cost in towns and villages	DHLGH, local authorities			–	D	I	D	–	–	–	–	–

	Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE
6.	Expand the Town and Village Renewal Scheme as an enabler to bring vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use as multipurpose spaces and for residential occupancy	DRCD	DHLGH, local authorities		–	D	I	D	–	I	–	–	–
7.	Invest in infrastructure, including water and wastewater infrastructure, to support the development of rural towns and villages	DHLGH	Irish Water, local authorities, other utility providers, other relevant departments		–	D	I	D	–	I	–	–	–
IV. Enhancing participation, leadership and resilience in rural communities													
1.	Implement a €70 million transitional LEADER programme for community-led rural development for the period 2021–2022, and develop and deliver a new LEADER programme to commence in 2023	DRCD	LEADER local action groups, local development companies		–	I	D	D	D	D	–	D	D
2.	Deliver the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) to the end of 2022, and develop a new SICAP programme to commence in 2023	DRCD	Local community development committees, local authorities, local development companies	With a budget in the order of €39 million per annum, the SICAP is one of the government's main programmes aimed at reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion and equality	–	I	I	D	–	I	–	–	–

Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE
3. Provide investment for multipurpose spaces in the community (e.g., community centres, libraries, and sports clubs) for a variety of activities (e.g., leisure, community, cultural and services)	DRCD	Local authorities, community groups		–	D	I	D	I	I	–	–	–
V. Enhancing public services in rural areas												
1. Provide improved rural public transport services and pilot new transport initiatives for people of all ages and abilities living in rural areas through:	Department of Transport, NTA		€1 billion has been committed over the period 2020 to 2024 to ensure the optimal maintenance, renewal and improvement of the rail infrastructure									
(i) delivering expanded Local Link services, and further integrating Local Link services with other existing public transport services through the roll-out of the NTA Connecting Ireland Plan				D	D	D	D	I	–	–	–	I
(ii) developing a subsidised local area hackney scheme in designated areas of rural Ireland which are too small or remote to support a full-time taxi or hackney service				I	D	I	D	I	–	–	–	I

Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE
(iii) developing and trialling a grant aided community transport service scheme through Local Link to support otherwise unsustainable community services				I	D	I	D	I	-	-	-	I
(iv) Running a pilot, after COVID-19 has abated, to examine the potential for ride-hailing services to improve rural connectivity				I	D	I	D	I	-	-	-	I
2. Establish 96 new community health-care networks throughout the country to reshape how community health-care services will be delivered and support people to live more independently in their community	Department of Health			-	D	I	D	-	-	-	-	-
3. Roll out a local community safety partnership pilot in a rural location	Department of Justice	Relevant departments, state agencies and local authorities		-	-	-	D	-	-	-	-	-

Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE
4. Invest in high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure specifically targeted at towns and villages across the country	Department of Transport	Local authorities	The government has committed a €50 million fund in 2021 for local-authority investment in high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure, specifically targeted at towns and villages across the country	I	D	I	D	D	–	–	D	I
5. Develop Gaeltacht service towns situated in or adjacent to Gaeltacht language planning areas which will play a significant role in providing public services, recreational, social and commercial facilities for those areas	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Local authorities		D	D	D	D	–	I	–	D	–
VI. Transitioning to a climate-neutral society												
1. Expand the Sustainable Energy Communities Network from 500 to 1,500 by 2030, to support local communities to be directly involved in energy projects	DECC	SEAI		–	D	I	D	–	D	D	D	D

	Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE
2.	Retrofit 500,000 homes and install 400,000 heat pumps across the country up to 2030, contributing to employment opportunities in rural areas	DECC	SEAI		-	D	D	D	-	-	-	D	D
3.	Bring investment and job opportunities to coastal communities by developing the offshore renewable energy sector, including through the development of an offshore transmission grid	DHLGH, DECC			I	D	D	D	-	D	I	D	D
4.	Rehabilitate peatlands to contribute to reduced carbon emissions, carbon sequestration and enhanced biodiversity, including through:	DECC, DHLGH											
	(i) Repurposing 80,000 acres of bog in the Midlands as part of a major peatland's restoration plan			€108 million provided to Bord na Móna for their Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation and Restoration Scheme; Bord na Móna contributed a further €18 million	-	I	D	D	I	-	I	-	D

Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE	
4	(ii) The national raised bog designated sites restoration programme to restore in the region of 25,000 hectares of raised bog			–	I	D	D	I	–	I	–	D	
VII. Supporting the sustainability of agriculture, the marine and forestry													
1.	Pilot a results-based agri-environment scheme to reward farmers for adapting to more sustainable methods of farming	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	€1.5 billion will be allocated to a REPS-2 programme to 2030 to encourage and incentivise farmers to farm in a greener and more sustainable way	–	–	–	I	–	–	D	–	D	
VIII. Supporting the sustainability of our islands and coastal communities													
1.	Progress vital infrastructure development for our island communities	DRCD	Relevant departments and agencies, local authorities	–	D	I	D	I	–	–	D	–	
2.	Establish gTeic enterprise hubs on the islands under the remit of Údarás na Gaeltachta to support employment opportunities	Údarás na Gaeltachta	Island communities	Údarás na Gaeltachta is rolling out a network of innovation and digital hubs with high-speed broadband connectivity. Hubs on 13 islands form part of this growing digital ecosystem	D	D	D	D	–	–	–	D	I

	Planned schemes/funds by thematic objective	Lead departments/agencies	Secondary departments/agencies	Funding	RW	RTV	RJ	RL	TCH	C	AMF	ICC	CNE
3.	Continue to invest in coastal communities through the FLAG scheme, providing support for investments by micro seafood enterprises and projects in the area of marine tourism and leisure and the wider marine sector	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	FLAGs	The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme for Ireland has provided €12 million in funding through seven FLAGs (2017–2021) to foster the socio-economic development and diversification of coastal communities and offshore islands traditionally dependent on fishing	D	D	D	D	D	–	D	D	–

Note: Legend for key deliverables: AMF: Agriculture, the marine and forestry; C: Supporting communities to create their own future; CNE: Transitioning to a climate-neutral economy; ICC: Island and coastal communities; RJ: Jobs for rural Ireland; RL: Rural living; RTV: Revitalising rural towns and villages; RW: Remote working; TCH: Rural Ireland’s unique tourism, culture and heritage. Also: D: Direct; I: Indirect.

CHAPTER 4

Monitoring the effectiveness of Our Rural Future

In this chapter, we identify potential KPIs that could be used to monitor how effective are the scheme-based measures in Our Rural Future (see Table 3.1) for achieving the policy's key deliverables. This work is based on an examination of nationally available data from government departments (e.g., DFHERIS and the DETE), state agencies (e.g., Pobal, Fáilte Ireland, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland [SEAI]), and CSO data (e.g., the Census, the Labour Force Survey [LFS], Business Demography and National Accounts).

The identified KPIs for each key deliverable are set out in Tables 4.1–4.9. The required KPI is listed in the first column in each table and its required geographic level is in the second. This is followed in the third column by the actual KPI/metric that is currently available; the spatial level that presently exists is the fourth; the data source is in the fifth; and whether the KPI is primarily economic, social, environmental or other is in the sixth column.

The majority of the identified KPIs exist in some form or other. Some of the KPIs are available in such a way that they could be used for monitoring rural development in their present form, while others would need to be produced at a more spatially disaggregated level. In a few instances, though, there is uncertainty around the existence of data for some of the identified KPIs.

In addition to the KPIs identified to measure the effectiveness of the current rural policy in achieving its key deliverables, in Table 4.10, we have identified KPIs for other 'high-level outcome' categories, such as health, well-being and education, which could be used to monitor the policy's general effectiveness in improving rural development and well-being.¹³ Such KPIs are consistent with the emphasis in the existing literature on the importance of taking a holistic approach to monitoring rural development and well-being by including a broad range of indicators on different facets of life. Thus, the metrics presented in this report are varied and wide-ranging with the intention of meeting this holistic approach criterion when

13 Some of the KPIs listed in Tables 4.1–4.9 would also measure general well-being, e.g., library membership (see Table 4.4).

measuring the effectiveness of the current rural development policy. In this table, we also include relevant indicators contained in the CSO's Well-being Information Hub.

The data sources listed in the tables are all publicly available, with the majority being collated by the CSO and available on their website. However, more detailed data for some of the data sources are available from the CSO, such as their Census, LFS and SILC data. Requesting access to these data, with the inclusion of additional fields, may allow for further spatial disaggregation than is feasible from the publicly available data. Ideally, for the purpose of monitoring the effectiveness of Our Rural Future, and any rural development policy, the CSO would, where it is feasible to do so, apply their six-way urban–rural classification to their data. In addition to CSO data, the identified KPIs in the tables below have also been drawn from government-department and other state-agency data sources. Again, where it is feasible to do so, the six-way urban–rural classification would also be applied to these data.

Some of the listed KPI data are available on a quarterly or annual basis (e.g., the LFS and the SILC), while other data are collected on a less regular basis (e.g., the Census) or in an ad-hoc manner (e.g., personal and work–life balance, remote working). This needs to be kept in mind when finalising the KPIs that will be used to monitor the effectiveness of Our Rural Future. Where feasible, annual or more frequent data should be used because ongoing monitoring is considered best practice with regards to rural (and other) development. In cases where any required data adjustments are not deemed possible, some KPIs may necessitate the DRCD, or other government agencies, collecting data annually on a sample of rural dwellers to fill any data gaps. Indeed, a potential strategy going forward may be to address the data gaps identified within this report through a bespoke rural survey tool.

TABLE 4.1 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE'S KEY DELIVERABLES: REMOTE WORKING

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
1.	Increase in broadband coverage in rural areas	Six-way classification	Households with internet access	Small area	CSO: Census	Economic
2.	Number of properties passed by NBI	Six-way classification	NBI premises passed	National	NBI	Economic
3.	Number of people using RW hubs annually	Six-way classification	No explicit KPI/dataset, but the majority of current RW hubs use the same back-end system via Connectedhubs.ie, so they may hold useful data; if the DRCD and WDC establish 400 RW hubs, as is set out in the current plan, this has the potential to give rise to data to assist with monitoring	Address details of all hubs publicly available	Connectedhubs.ie (DRCD/WDC potential data source)	Economic, Social
4.	Number of hubs in the national RW hub network	Six-way classification	Connectedhubs.ie hold data on the majority of hubs and their address; if the DRCD and WDC establish 400 RW hubs, as is set out in the current plan, this has the potential to give rise to data to assist with monitoring	Address details of all hubs publicly available	Connectedhubs.ie/The National Hub Network (DRCD/WDC potential data source)	Economic
5.	Proportion of people in occupations/sectors where RW might be feasible	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15–89 years in employment (NACE Rev 2 sectors)	Region	CSO: LFS	Economic
6.	Proportion of people in public sector where remotely working might be feasible	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15–89 years in employment (NACE Rev 2 sectors)	Region	CSO: LFS	Economic
7.	Proportion of people in essential occupations that are unlikely to work remotely (e.g., nursing, cleaners, etc.)	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15–89 years in employment (NACE Rev 2 Sectors)	Region	CSO: LFS	Economic

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
8.	Proportion of people working from home in past 12 months	Six-way classification	Employees aged 18 years and over by whether they availed of RW in their employment in the previous 12 months/pre-COVID-19	National (region)	CSO: Personal and Work-Life Balance, Remote Working	Economic, Social
9.	Distance to RW hub	Six-way classification	Average distance and number of remote work hubs and childcare services to residential dwellings	County	CSO: Distance to Remote Work Hubs and Childcare Services	Economic, Social

TABLE 4.2 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE'S KEY DELIVERABLES: REVITALISING RURAL TOWNS AND VILLAGES

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
1.	Increase in number of people living in rural areas	Six-way classification	Population change	Six-way classification	CSO: Census	Social
2.	Increase in number of people living in rural areas in employment	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15 years and over in employment	Region	CSO: LFS	Economic
3.	Increase in number of people living in rural areas in self-employment	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15 years and over self-employed	Six-way classification/region	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland, LFS	Economic
4.	Increase in rural transport services	Urban–rural binary (further disaggregation difficult)	Summary of scheduled bus passenger services: vehicle kms	Dublin city services, provincial city and town services, other scheduled services, school transport	CSO: Transport Omnibus	Social, Economic
5.	Increase in rural transport numbers	Urban–rural binary (further disaggregation difficult)	Summary of scheduled bus passenger services: passenger numbers	Dublin city services, provincial city and town services, other scheduled services, school transport	CSO: Transport Omnibus	Social, Economic
6.	Number of town regeneration projects funded	Region or some geographic breakdown			DRCD	Economic, Social

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
7.	Proportion of children	Six-way classification	Primary school students usually resident and present in the state	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland	Social
8.	Proportion of working-age adults	Six-way classification	Population usually resident and present in the state (age)	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland	Economic
9.	Proportion from an ethnic-minority background	Six-way classification	Population usually resident and present in the state (country of birth)	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland	Social
10.	New houses built	Six-way classification	New dwelling completions	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland; Department of Housing may also hold such data	Social
11.	Number of businesses	Six-way classification	Active enterprises	County	CSO: Business Demography	Economic
12.	Number of vacant homes	Six-way classification	Occupancy status of permanent dwellings on Census night	Small area	CSO: Census	Economic, Social
13.	Planning permission granted for commercial buildings	Six-way classification	Planning permissions granted (commercial buildings)	Region	CSO: Construction	Economic
14.	Planning permission granted for commercial buildings	Six-way classification	Planning permissions granted (other buildings for social use)	Region	CSO: Construction	Economic
15.	Number of high-growth businesses	Six-way classification	High-growth enterprises with 10 or more employees in base year	NUTS 3 Regions	CSO: High Growth Enterprises	Economic
16.	Employment in high-growth businesses	Six-way classification	High-growth enterprises, persons engaged, turnover and gross value added	National	CSO: High Growth Enterprises	Economic
17.	Access to basic services	Six-way classification	Households able to access local services: supermarket, bank, post office, any form of public transport, GP	Urban–rural split	CSO: SILC	Social

TABLE 4.3 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE'S KEY DELIVERABLES: REVITALISING JOBS FOR RURAL IRELAND

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI Type
1.	Job creation outside Dublin	Six-way classification	Jobchurn components; job creation (numbers)	National	CSO: Jobchurn	Economic, Social
2.	People moving jobs for higher wages	Six-way classification	Separation with new employment (indicator of wage increase)	National	CSO: Jobchurn	Economic
3.	Regional average income	Six-way classification	Median income measures	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland	Economic
4.	Number of students attending regional third-level institutions	Regions or lower	Students from Ireland and Northern Ireland	County	CSO, Department of Education	Economic
5.	Number of students attending regional third-level institutions	Institution	Students enrolled in and entrants to third-level courses	Institution	CSO, DFHERIS	Economic
6.	New businesses	Six-way classification	Enterprise survival (NACE Rev 2), enterprise births in reference year	National	CSO: Business Demography	Economic
7.	Employment in foreign-owned businesses	Six-way classification	Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact, indicators: total employment (persons)	Region	CSO, DETE: Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact	Economic
8.	Rural dwellers working or studying in rural areas	Six-way classification	Could be generated using 'Place of work, school or college' (Census)	Six-way classification	CSO: Census	Economic, Social
9.	Social enterprises	Six-way classification	Number of social enterprises	County	DRCD: Social Enterprise Survey	Economic

TABLE 4.4 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE'S KEY DELIVERABLES: RURAL LIVING

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
1.	Reduction in regional income disparity	Six-way classification	National income definition, national equivalence scale: equivalised total disposable income (euro)	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland	Economic
2.	Usage trends in non-urban post offices	Urban–rural binary			An Post may hold data on this	Social
3.	Number of participants in online learning in rural communities	Urban–rural binary	Persons aged 18–74 years engaged in lifelong learning	National	CSO: Well-being	Other
4.	Number of participants in lifelong learning in rural communities	Six-way classification	Participation rates in education by persons aged 25–64	Region	CSO: Adult Education Survey	Other
5.	Number of kilometres of walking and cycling infrastructure	Spatial level not important			Transport Infrastructure Ireland may hold data on this	Environmental
6.	Length of commute	Six-way classification	Population aged 5 years and over by 'journey time to work, school or college'	Small area	CSO: Census	Environmental
7.	Car usage	Six-way classification	Number of cars per household	Small area	CSO: Census	Environmental
8.	Library membership	County	Percentage of population that is a registered library member	County	National Oversight and Audit Commission	Social

TABLE 4.5 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE'S KEY DELIVERABLES: RURAL IRELAND'S UNIQUE TOURISM, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
1.	Numbers employed in outdoor activity sector	Region	Not available for that sector, but employment in accommodation and food services sector often used as proxy for tourism employment	Region	CSO: LFS	Economic
2.	Economic value generated by outdoor activity sector	Region	Gross value added at basic prices (sector)	National	CSO: National Accounts	Economic
3.	Visitor numbers by region	Region	Overseas trips to and from Ireland (residents and non-residents)	National	CSO: Tourism and Travel Quarterly Series	Economic
4.	Visitor numbers by region	Region	Domestic travel by Irish residents	County visited	CSO: Household Travel Survey	Economic
5.	Visitor numbers by region	Region	Overseas trips to and from Ireland	National available via CSO; region visited available from Fáilte Ireland	CSO: Survey of Overseas Travellers	Economic
6.	Number of attractions	County	Attractions	All attractions are listed with their address including county	Fáilte Ireland	Economic, Social
7.	Number of accommodation places	County	Accommodation	All accommodations are listed with their address including county	Fáilte Ireland	Economic
8.	Number of activities	County	Activities	All places to do activities are listed with their address including county	Fáilte Ireland	Economic, Social

TABLE 4.6 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE'S KEY DELIVERABLES: SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO CREATE THEIR OWN FUTURE

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
1.	Volunteer hours worked per year in the community	Six-way classification	The number of hours/days volunteers work per month by volunteering managers	National	Pobal	Social
2.	Number of community activist and citizen advocacy groups and organisations	Six-way classification	Number of organisations registered with Public Participation Network	Local authority	DRCD	Other
3.	Political participation	Six-way classification	How much respondents believe that the political system allows people to have a say in what the government does	Degree of urbanisation (city, town or rural)	CSO: Trust Survey	Other
4.	Political participation	Six-way classification	Voter turnout	Constituency	irelandelection.com	Other
5.	Support (in contributions) for community-based organisations	Six-way classification			Pobal may hold data on this	Social
6.	Percentage of employment in Irish-owned companies	Six-way classification	Annual business survey of economic impact indicators (total employment)	Region	CSO: Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact, Indicators	Economic

TABLE 4.7 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE’S KEY DELIVERABLES: AGRICULTURE, THE MARINE AND FORESTRY

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
1.	Number of female farmers	Spatial level not important	Family and regular non-family workers (persons) on all farms	Region	CSO: Census of Agriculture	Other
2.	Number of family farms in female ownership	Spatial level not important	Family farms	Region	CSO: Farm Structure Survey	Other
3.	Numbers aged less than 40 working in agriculture, forestry and fishing	Spatial level not important	Numbers aged less than 40 working in agriculture, forestry and fishing, separately for self-employed and employees	Region	CSO: LFS	Other
4.	Output from agriculture	Spatial level not important	Quantity of agricultural output	National	CSO: Agricultural output, input and income	Economic
5.	Land in use	Spatial level not important	Area farmed in June	Region	CSO: Agriculture area used and crop production	Economic

TABLE 4.8 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE’S KEY DELIVERABLES: ISLAND AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
1.	gTeic enterprise hub usage on the islands	Not needed – subsample of islands. Electoral-division level may be useful as some islands are their own electoral division			Unknown; Údarás na Gaeltachta may hold data	Economic
2.	Job creation on the islands	Islands only	Jobchurn components, Job creation (numbers)	National	CSO: Jobchurn	Economic
3.	Number of kilowatts generated by offshore renewable energy sector	Spatial level not important	Energy balance	National	CSO, SEAI	Environmental

TABLE 4.9 POTENTIAL KPIS FOR MONITORING OUR RURAL FUTURE'S KEY DELIVERABLES: TRANSITIONING TO A CLIMATE-NEUTRAL ECONOMY

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source	KPI type
1.	Number of retrofits	Six-way classification			Unknown: SEAI may hold data	Environmental
2.	Number of community energy projects	Six-way classification			Unknown: SEAI may hold data	Environmental
3.	Number of people engaged in microgeneration of renewable electricity	Six-way classification			Unknown: SEAI may hold data	Environmental
4.	Energy generated from microgeneration of renewable electricity	Six-way classification			Unknown: SEAI may hold data	Environmental
5.	Demand for electric vehicles in rural areas	Six-way classification	New and second-hand private cars	County	CSO Vehicle Licensing Statistics	Environmental

TABLE 4.10 OTHER POTENTIAL MEASURES FOR MONITORING OVERALL RURAL WELL-BEING IN IRELAND

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source
I. Deprivation					
1.	At risk of poverty, consistent poverty or deprivation	Six-way classification	Key national indicators of poverty and social exclusion	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland
2.	Deprivation index	Six-way classification	Change in the percentage of small areas deemed most deprived over time	Small area (some calculation needed)	HP Deprivation Index
II. Income and wealth					
1.	Median real household income	Six-way classification	Gross income less tax, social-insurance contributions and inter-household transfer paid (adjusted for inflation)	Urban–rural split	CSO: SILC
2.	Median household net wealth	Six-way classification	Median value of household assets (property, savings, stock, etc.) minus liabilities (loans)	Region	CSO: Household Finance and Consumption Survey

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source
3.	Households making ends meet with great difficulty	Six-way classification	Percentage of persons in the total population who are in the state of enforced inability to make ends meet	Urban–rural split	CSO: SILC
III. Economy and jobs					
1.	High-growth enterprises	Six-way classification	Number of high-growth enterprises; number of people engaged; growth rate (%)	Region	CSO: High Growth Enterprises
2.	Good jobs	Urban–rural	Percentage of people on permanent contracts (or on temporary contracts and not seeking permanent work), who earn what could be deemed a living wage and are not overworked (working more than 49 hours/week)		Such a variable is not available but could be generated from various CSO sources primarily the LFS
3.	Employment of export reliant firms	Six-way classification	Enterprises very reliant on exports (persons engaged)	Region	CSO: Exporting Enterprises in Ireland
4.	Number of export reliant firms	Six-way classification	Enterprises very reliant on exports (exporting enterprises)	Region	CSO: Exporting Enterprises in Ireland
5.	Labour underutilisation rate	Six-way classification	Number of persons classified as unemployed, plus those classified as part-time underemployed, plus those outside of labour force who are available for work but not seeking work as a percentage share of the total labour force	Region	CSO: LFS
6.	Employment rate	Six-way classification	Number of persons aged 15–64 years expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 15–64 years	Region	CSO: LFS
7.	Mean weekly earnings	Six-way classification	Gross annual earnings sourced from Revenue divided by the number of weeks worked for each employment	Region	CSO: Earnings Analysis using Administrative Data Sources
8.	Long working hours in main job	Six-way classification	Percentage of persons in employment aged 15–89 years that usually work 49 hours or more per week in their main job	Region	CSO: LFS

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source
9.	Satisfied with job	Six-way classification	Employees aged 18 years and over by their job satisfaction and perceived pressure of work	National	CSO: Personal and Work-Life Balance Job and Life Satisfaction
IV. Access to services and transport					
1.	Nearest public-transport stop	Six-way classification	Nearest public transport option for the population	National	CSO: Measuring Distance to Everyday Services in Ireland
2.	Distance to national primary and secondary roads	Six-way classification	Population in 2016, distance to national primary and secondary road network	Region and county	CSO: Measuring Distance to Everyday Services in Ireland
3.	Access to everyday services: GP, pharmacy, bank, garda station, fire station, library, etc.	Six-way classification	Population in 2016 to everyday services	Region and county	CSO: Measuring Distance to Everyday Services in Ireland
4.	Access to local services	Six-way classification	Households who were able to access local services (level of accessibility)	Urban–rural split	CSO: SILC Report on Household Amenities and Access to Services
V. Well-being					
1.	Life satisfaction	Six-way classification	Overall life satisfaction	National	CSO: SILC Module on Well-being
2.	Low mood	Six-way classification	Feeling downhearted or depressed	National	CSO: SILC Module on Well-being
3.	Happiness	Six-way classification	Percentage of individuals' emotional well-being indicators (most frequently felt emotion)	National	CSO: SILC Module on Well-being
4.	Loneliness	Six-way classification	Feeling lonely	National	CSO: SILC Module on Well-being
5.	Satisfaction with leisure time	Six-way classification	Satisfaction with time use (amount of leisure time)	National	CSO: SILC Module on Well-being
6.	Social inclusion	Six-way classification	Satisfaction indicator mean score (perceived social inclusion)	National	CSO: SILC Module on Well-being
7.	Personal relationships	Six-way classification	Satisfaction indicator mean score (satisfaction with personal relationships)	National	CSO: SILC Module on Well-being
8.	Trusting of other people	Six-way classification	Satisfaction indicator mean score (trust in others)	National	CSO: SILC Module on Well-being

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source
9.	Population with at least two people they are close enough to count on if they had a serious problem	Six-way classification	How many people (e.g., neighbours and friends) on whom persons aged 15 years and over can count in the event of a serious problem	Region	CSO: Irish Health Survey Carers
VI. Health					
1.	Health behaviours	Six-way classification	Prevalence of smoking, drinking alcohol, and fruit and vegetable consumption of persons aged 15 years and over	Region	CSO: Irish Health Survey ^a
2.	Prevalence of disabilities	Six-way classification	Population usually resident and present with a disability	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland
3.	Self-rated health	Six-way classification	Population's general health	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland ^a
4.	Mental health	Six-way classification	All persons aged 15 and over, mental-health status in previous two weeks	Region	CSO: Irish Health Survey ^a
5.	Activity limited by disability	Six-way classification	Limitations in everyday activities due to a health problem	Region	CSO: Irish Health Survey ^a
6.	Involvement in sports or physical activities	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15 years and over who participate in sport or physical activity	Region or degree of Urbanisation	CSO: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) Sports and Physical Exercise ^b
7.	Walking	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15 years and over participation in walking, sport and/or other physical activity	Region	CSO: QNHS Sports and Physical Exercise ^c
8.	Absenteeism because of health	Six-way classification	Average number of days absent from work due to a health problem of persons aged 15 years and over	Region	CSO: Irish Health Survey
9.	Use of medication	Six-way classification	All persons aged 15 and over classified by use of prescribed and non-prescribed medicines in the two weeks prior to interview	Region	CSO: Irish Health Survey ^c
10.	Healthy life years	Six-way classification	Healthy life years at birth by sex	National	Eurostat/CSO Well-being Information Hub
11.	Unmet need for medical attention	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15 years and over that reported having unmet health care needs in the previous 12 months	National	CSO: Irish Health Survey

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source
12.	Carers providing at least 20 hours care per week	Six-way classification	Percentage of persons aged 15 years and over who provide care (excluding professional activities) to another person at least once a week	Region	CSO: Irish Health Survey Carers
VII. Education					
1.	Skills development at primary level	Urban–rural	OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, Trends in Mathematics and Science Study	National	Educational Research Centre: Programme for International Student Assessment, TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center
2.	Skills development at secondary level	Urban–rural	OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, Trends in Mathematics and Science Study	National	Educational Research Centre: Programme for International Student Assessment, TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center
3.	Educational attainment	Six-way classification	Population aged 15 years and over by sex and highest level of education completed	Small area	CSO: Census
4.	Participation in education	Six-way classification	Participation rates in education by persons aged 25–64	Region	CSO: Adult Education Survey
5.	Engagement with further education	Six-way classification	Persons aged 25–64 who wanted to participate more in further education	Region	CSO: Adult Education Survey
6.	On the job training	Six-way classification	Type of training	National	CSO: Continuing Vocational Training
7.	Apprenticeships	Six-way classification	Number of qualified apprentices	National	CSO: Further Education Outcomes
8.	School leavers' outcomes	Six-way classification	Outcomes overview	National	CSO: Post-Primary Outcomes
9.	Reading and maths performance in 15-year-olds	Six-way classification	Percentage of students aged between 15 years and 3 months and 16 years and 2 months with Level 3 proficiency in reading or mathematics performance	National	CSO: Programme for International Student Assessment
10.	Lifelong learning rate	Six-way classification	Persons aged 18–74 years who have participated in formal education or training in the four weeks preceding the interview for the LFS	Region	CSO: LFS

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source
VIII. Housing and built environment					
1.	New dwelling completions	Six-way classification	Recently constructed dwellings	Local electoral area, local authority, region	CSO: New Dwelling Completions
2.	A or B domestic energy rating	Six-way classification	A Building Energy Rating indicator (energy performance of a dwelling)	National	CSO: Domestic Building Energy Ratings
3.	Average distance to everyday services	Six-way classification	Average distance of residential dwellings to everyday services in Ireland such as schools, hospitals, public transport and post offices	Region and county	CSO: Measuring Distance to Everyday Services in Ireland
4.	At-risk-of-poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest	Six-way classification	This indicator is calculated based on an alternative measure of equivalised income, excluding the total rent paid and mortgage interest	Urban–rural split	CSO: SILC
IX. Environment, climate and biodiversity					
1.	Pollution, grime or other environmental problems	Six-way classification	Percentage of households who face the problem of pollution, grime or other environmental problems in the local area such as: smoke, dust, unpleasant smells or polluted water	Urban–rural split	CSO: SILC
2.	Water bodies assessed as high or good	Six-way classification	Proportion of rivers in Ireland with good, ambient water quality based on the Water Framework Directive	National	Environmental Protection Agency
3.	Greenhouse gas emissions	Six-way classification	Greenhouse gas emissions (CO ₂ , N ₂ O, CH ₄ , HFC, PFC, SF ₆) '000 tonnes CO ₂ equivalent	National	CSO: Environmental Accounts Air Emissions
4.	Waste to landfill	Six-way classification	Percentage of municipal waste generated and treated in Ireland which is sent to landfill	National	CSO: Measuring Ireland's Progress
X. Safety and security					
1.	Murder rates per 100,000 population	Six-way classification	Recorded crime incidents classified as murder expressed as a percentage of the population	Garda station	CSO: Recorded Crime

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source
2.	Persons killed or injured on roads	Six-way classification	Number of road deaths and number of injured casualties on the roads in Ireland between 1 January and 31 December each year	County	Road Safety Authority: Road Fatalities and Injured Casualties
3.	Population who worry they could be a victim of crime	Six-way classification	Percentage of the population aged 18 years and over who worry (often or all of the time) that they could be a victim of a crime causing physical injury	Region	CSO: Crime and Victimization
XI. Other					
1.	Ethnic diversity of the population	Six-way classification	Usually resident population, ethnicity	Small area	CSO: Census
2.	Homeownership	Six-way classification	Occupancy status of permanent dwellings on Census night	Small area	CSO: Census
3.	Criminal offences	Six-way classification	Recorded crime offences under reservation	Garda region (4)	CSO: Recorded Crime
4.	Victims of crime	Six-way classification	All persons who were victims of personal crime	Region	CSO: Crime and Victimization
5.	Households that experience household crime	Six-way classification	All households that were victims of household crime	Region	CSO: Crime and Victimization
6.	Issues with area of residence	Six-way classification	Households who reported problems with dwelling and local environment (noise, pollution or crime)	Urban–rural split	CSO: SILC Report on Household Amenities and Access to Services
7.	Green space	Six-way classification	Using the natural environment for recreation/exercise	Degree of urbanisation	CSO: Pulse Survey: Our Lives Outdoors
8.	Pollution	County	Air quality	Nearest monitoring station (some manipulation needed)	EPA: Air Quality Index for Health
9.	Reliance on social welfare	Six-way classification	Proportion of households where working-age social welfare was the majority income	Six-way classification	CSO: Urban and Rural Life in Ireland
10.	Member of sports or fitness clubs	Six-way classification	Persons aged 15 years and over who are members of sports or fitness clubs	Region	CSO: QNHS Sports and Physical Exercise
11.	Homeless persons	Six-way classification	Homeless persons	Region	CSO: Census 2016 Homeless Count

	Required KPI	Spatial level required	Available KPI	Spatial level available	Source
12.	Persons who experienced discrimination in the previous two years	Six-way classification	Percentage of persons aged 18 years and over that felt they had been discriminated against in the previous two years	Region	CSO: Equality and Discrimination
13.	Satisfaction with how democracy works in Ireland	Six-way classification	Percentage of persons aged 15 years and over that are satisfied with the way democracy works in their own country	National	European Union: Eurobarometer Report

Notes: (a) The Department of Health's 'Healthy Ireland Survey' also likely contains such data. (b) Data also available in Growing up in Ireland, The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, and Irish Sports Monitor. (c) Data also available in The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing and Irish Sports Monitor.

Across Tables 4.1 to 4.9, we have identified 70 potential KPIs to monitor the effectiveness of Our Rural Future (see Table 4.11).¹⁴ Of this, we have found that 60 are currently available at some level of spatial disaggregation for monitoring: national, region, county, urban–rural split, etc.¹⁵

TABLE 4.11 POTENTIAL KPIS TO MONITOR OUR RURAL FUTURE’S SCHEMES: CURRENTLY AVAILABLE AND SIX-WAY CLASSIFICATION

	Key deliverable	Required KPIs	Available KPIs	Six-way classification required	Six-way classification available
1.	RW	9	8	9	0
2.	RTV	17	16	14	6
3.	RJ	9	9	7	2
4.	RL	8	6	4	1
5.	TCH	8	8	0	–
6.	C	6	5	6	–
7.	AMF	5	5	0	–
8.	ICC	3	2	0	–
9.	CNE	5	1	5	–
	Total	70	60	45	9

Legend for key deliverables: AMF: Agriculture, the marine and forestry; C: Supporting communities to create their own future; CNE: Transitioning to a climate-neutral economy; ICC: Island and coastal communities; RJ: Jobs for rural Ireland; RL: Rural living; RTV: Revitalising rural towns and villages; RW: Remote working; TCH: Rural Ireland’s unique tourism, culture and heritage

However, of the 70 potential KPIs identified, data are required for 45 of these at the CSO’s six-way urban–rural classification, with such data presently existing for only nine of the 45 KPIs.¹⁶

In relation to KPIs to monitor the current policy’s general effectiveness in improving overall rural well-being, we have identified a total of 73 such KPIs (see Table 4.12).¹⁷ Of these, 72 are currently available to conduct such monitoring of the policy’s effectiveness at some level of spatial disaggregation (national, county, urban–rural split, etc.).¹⁸ However, for 69 of the KPIs, we would like data to be available at the CSO’s six-way urban–rural classification level, with presently such data only existing for four of these KPIs.¹⁹

14 Figure obtained by summing the number of ‘Required KPIs’ presented in Tables 4.1–4.9.

15 Figure obtained from the information provided in the ‘Available KPI’ column in Tables 4.1–4.9.

16 Information obtained from the ‘Spatial Level Available’ column in Tables 4.1–4.9.

17 Figure obtained by summing the number of ‘Required KPIs’ presented in Table 4.10.

18 Figure obtained from the information provided in the ‘Available KPI’ column in Table 4.10.

19 Information obtained from the ‘Spatial Level Available’ column in Table 4.10.

TABLE 4.12 POTENTIAL KPIS TO MONITOR OUR RURAL FUTURE'S EFFECTIVENESS IN IMPROVING OVERALL RURAL WELL-BEING: CURRENTLY AVAILABLE AND SIX-WAY CLASSIFICATION

	Theme	Required KPIs	Available KPIs	Six-way classification required	Six-way classification available
1.	Deprivation	2	2	2	1
2.	Income and wealth	3	3	3	0
3.	Economy and jobs	9	8	8	0
4.	Access to services and transport	4	4	4	0
5.	Well-being	9	9	9	0
6.	Health	12	12	12	2
7.	Education	10	10	8	0
8.	Housing and built environment	4	4	4	0
9.	Environment, climate and biodiversity	4	4	4	0
10.	Safety and security	3	3	3	0
11.	Other	13	13	12	1
	Total	73	72	69	4

CHAPTER 5

Summary and conclusions

Policy evaluation is a central pillar of effective government. The nature of community and rural development policy renders the use of standard counterfactual approaches impractical, which, in turn, creates a need for effective monitoring. Monitoring approaches to measuring the effectiveness of rural development policy can take two principal forms. The first approach is centred on measuring and tracking general levels of well-being within rural areas using metrics specifically connected to a range of policy objectives. Approaches to measuring general well-being can either track a range of individual KPIs or some combined measure using a specifically constructed index. The second approach involves the tracking of KPIs that are specifically tied to project spending within formal monitoring frameworks, such as the logic model or the four-pillar approach.

The objective of this study is to develop a framework and to identify potential KPIs that could be used by the DRCD to assist it in monitoring the effectiveness of the government's rural development policies, commencing with the current policy, *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021–2025*. In particular, we are interested in monitoring the effectiveness of the scheme-based measures that are set out in *Our Rural Future* in achieving its nine key deliverables and the identification of KPIs that will reflect general levels of well-being within rural communities (see Chapter 3).

In undertaking this work, and based on international best practice that advocates adopting a holistic approach to measuring the effectiveness of rural development policies, we also identified KPIs for 'high-level' outcomes such as health, well-being and education. The monitoring of overall rural well-being in this manner is important given the difficulties in isolating the impact of individual policy measures as well as the fact that a single measure may impact many areas of life given the complexity and interwoven nature of policymaking.

All identified KPIs, which are based on an examination of nationally available government-department, state-agency and CSO data, are set out in Tables 4.1–4.10. In presenting these indicators, we have also outlined where gaps exist in the

available data to be able to monitor the effectiveness of Our Rural Future. A number of these gaps could potentially be addressed by the CSO to assist the DRCD in monitoring rural well-being. This would also apply to identified government-department and state-agency data. Ensuring data are available at the most spatially disaggregated level possible, taking account of data confidentiality and any other data concerns, would be beneficial to the DRCD in its monitoring and evaluation work, along with other government departments, policymakers, etc., who engage in similar policy monitoring and evaluation work.

Based on some emerging literature (Michalek and Zarnekow, 2012), it would be strongly recommended to explore the possibility of developing a composite indicator of rural development in Ireland, such as an RDI, to monitor the effectiveness of the country's rural development policies or general levels of rural well-being. While such an RDI will not allow for the monitoring of specific measures being implemented as part of Our Rural Future, if it proves to be feasible to develop such an index then it would allow for the monitoring of ongoing rural development across the period of interest, 2021–2025, and the tracking of progress in rural areas. Given the magnitude of data available for monitoring rural development in Ireland, as identified in this report, it is potentially feasible to develop such an index.

Another matter that should be given serious consideration for monitoring rural development in Ireland is increased implementation of the CSO's six-way urban–rural classification. Approaches to measuring rural well-being have typically applied a standard urban–rural dichotomy. However, this approach masks a huge amount of heterogeneity in the barriers faced by areas with differing levels of urbanicity. This is highlighted by research for Ireland (Whelan et al., 2023) which used the six-way classification to demonstrate that barriers to social inclusion were more prevalent in independent towns relative to either highly rural or highly urban areas. In our opinion, the application of KPIs based on a standard urban–rural split, whether used within monitoring frameworks or as a means to measure general well-being, will be of limited value for policymakers.²⁰ It is well documented in the literature that there is considerable heterogeneity within rural areas, thus reducing

20 On the policy side, Our Rural Future recognises a spectrum of rurality and the importance of taking this into consideration in any rural development policy.

the usefulness of an urban–rural binary and indicating that some sort of further disaggregation of urban–rural continuum is needed.

In the context of monitoring the effectiveness of the current rural development policy, if application of the CSO’s six-way urban–rural classification to all available data was achieved, then the number of available rural indicators to monitor the current policy’s effectiveness in achieving its key deliverables would rise from nine to 45 (see Table 4.11), while the number of KPIs available to monitor the policy’s effectiveness in improving overall rural well-being would increase to 69 from four (Table 4.12). It is imperative that efforts are made to achieve this, as obviously the capacity to effectively monitor the impacts of rural policy initiatives in Ireland is not achievable with just nine metrics available at the required spatial level.

Finally, and also in light of the heterogeneity of rural areas, best practice encourages the use of stakeholder engagement in identifying metrics given that a useful indicator in one area may not hold the same weight in another. Many of the rural policy frameworks discussed in Chapter 2 supported a bottom-up approach, whereby engagement with the communities being targeted is key. The success of the LEADER programme has been, in part, attributed to such a bottom-up approach. In the LEADER context, this bottom-up approach took the form of local action groups (LAGs) made up of representatives from the community, private and public sectors. These LAGs then decided how funding would be best spent to benefit their particular area with its own individualities. This is in contrast to ‘one-size fits all’ funding that can emerge from a top-down approach. A bottom-up approach also underpinned the development of Our Rural Future, and this participatory methodology still informs a number of areas of the policy’s implementation. Some examples would be rural ideas forums, higher-education institutions, community involvement and local community development companies.

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