

# A Well-being Framework for Ireland



## Understanding Life in Ireland: A Wellbeing Perspective

### Online Stakeholder Event

Wednesday, November 17<sup>th</sup> 2021

#### Purpose and Structure of the Event

The First Report on the development of a Well-being Framework for Ireland was published by Government in July 2021 and included a commitment to a further phase of consultation. A Public Conversation was launched on October 26<sup>th</sup> 2021 to gain insight, receive feedback and test the Framework.

The online Stakeholder event held on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, was a central part of the Public Conversation, alongside several other elements including a communications campaign, an online survey and thematic workshops.

The event included representatives from a broad selection of organisations and groups. In total just under 100 attendees were present for the duration of the event.

Feedback from this event, together with the outcomes and insights of the other elements of the Public Conversation, will help inform further development of the Well-being initiative, including an updated Conceptual Framework.

#### The event included:

- Welcome Address by Micheál Martin, T.D. Taoiseach
- Roundtable Discussion chaired by Minister Eamon Ryan, T.D., with six panellists bringing international, national and local experiences
- Interactive Breakout Sessions, involving all attendees
- Presentation of [Well-being Information Hub](#) by Central Statistics Office
- Contribution by Minister Michael McGrath, T.D.

## **Roundtable discussion**

A round table discussion to inform the breakout sessions was hosted by Minister Eamon Ryan, T.D. (Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications). The panellists were:

1. Gabriel Makhoul, Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland
2. Ann Irwin, Community Work Ireland
3. Barra Roantree, ESRI
4. Adeline O' Brien, CEO of Empower
5. Andy Fanning, EPA
6. Vivian Geiran, author of the Drogheda Community Safety and Wellbeing Report

The roundtable discussion drew out themes on the development of Well-being Frameworks, including the evolution in economic theory that has led to this approach being widely used internationally. The importance of cross-sectoral approaches across Government in addressing complex issues was also highlighted. Attention was drawn in particular to the development process and the need for patience in progressing and implementing the Framework. Possible uses for the Framework, including the ability to disaggregate to draw out inequalities and for focusing on complex issues at a local or community-based level was also discussed.

## **Breakout sessions**

The break-out sessions were facilitated by officials from the National Economic and Social Council and the Department of the Taoiseach. These discussions were centred around five questions.

### **Key themes:**

Inclusion, accessibility, engagement, and trust featured across the break-out sessions. Particular aspects for further consideration for the Framework included economic and environmental sustainability, housing and local area and infrastructure. The importance of integration into the policy making system was highlighted, with reducing siloes emphasised in particular. Improving data – including better leveraging of existing data – was also explored as was the need to examine all the dimensions and indicators simultaneously in a linked, holistic fashion.

There was a clear acknowledgement of the importance of explicit recognition of trade-offs within the framework. It was suggested that this could be a useful communications tool when explaining difficult decisions, in particular in terms of finite resources and sustainability. Linkages between specific dimensions were also drawn out.

Discussions on potential uses for the framework centred around its uses in informing long-term planning; strategic coherence was emphasised. It was highlighted that the Framework has the potential to support coherence in policy (both vertical and horizontal) across Government, civil society and community.

## Detailed summary of breakout sessions

### 1. What do you see as the most important elements of a good quality of life for the people of Ireland?

Several cross-cutting themes were highlighted when discussing the above questions including:

- **Interactions between dimensions**, particularly socioeconomic group/ economic issues as a key driver which can impact overall quality of life, alongside specific dimensions (e.g. disadvantaged communities suffer worse air quality).
- **Accessibility**, both in terms of access to services and basic needs (e.g. housing, transport, education and childcare) alongside physical infrastructure for those with a disability.
- **Inclusion and engagement in decision-making**, with an emphasis on promoting the concept of agency. Engagement should be focused in particular on groups that are often left out of discussions such as those with low literacy, numeracy or digital skills and those from minority communities.
- The need to address **basic needs** before discussion on well-being can be relevant to all people. If the framework moves on without first establishing these baselines then certain people will be left behind. Therefore, it was suggested that basic needs should be built into the framework.

Several areas that are already included in the Framework were highlighted as important including:

- Trust, which was raised numerous times including:
  - trust between individuals;
  - trust in government;
  - public institutions' trust in the community and voluntary sector or the individual/citizen
- Community
- Lifelong learning/Non-formal learning
- Family and family connections
- Safety
- The environment, biodiversity and climate change
- The importance of disaggregation when reviewing progress to assess inequality in well-being across different groups of people

### 2. Is there anything missing from the Well-being Framework as outlined above? Or anything that should not be included?

Suggestions for adjusting the Framework included:

- **Economic sustainability** – including state finances – should be included explicitly
- An emphasis on the **economic benefit of education**
- 'Accommodation' rather than housing to encompass the needs of the Travelling community
- The **built environment** to be included explicitly in the 'Housing and Local Area' dimension
- The agriculture sector should feature more prominently

Some more specific suggestions on indicators and data were also made including:

- The need for **better data on equality**, including on disability, ethnicity and women's health.
- The possibility of a **weighted approach** of all indicators
- That some issues, programmes or cohorts are too small to measure statistically, emphasising the importance of **evaluation** which can address this lack.

- 3. What linkages exist between the various dimensions? Where do the dimensions work together and where do they pull against each other?**
- 4. What are the most important areas for sustainable well-being for future generations? What trade-offs exist between current and future well-being?**

Questions three and four (above) were generally discussed together, with trade-offs between dimensions and intergenerational wellbeing highlighted.

In general, the importance of acknowledging trade-offs within the framework was highlighted. It was suggested that explicitly drawing out trade-offs, using the Framework, could be a useful communications tool when explaining difficult decisions – in particular in terms of finite resources or sustainability. However, it was raised that it was important to maintain focus on where different aspects of well-being can create a virtuous circle of improving well-being rather than focusing exclusively on negative trade-offs.

Specific linkages between the dimensions as laid out in the Framework were highlighted, including:

- The importance of safety concerning the 'Housing and Local Area' and the 'Community, Social Connections and Cultural Participation' dimensions.
- Linkages between environment and health, which could be emphasised more.

Specific discussion on the difference between current and future/sustainable wellbeing included:

- Highlighting that accumulation of wealth, in particular, has negative environmental impacts in the future.
- The green transition is highlighting tensions in energy and food production in particular.
- The importance of future-proofing current investment and policy to safeguard the future.

A broader discussion on linking the Framework to existing initiatives and concepts occurred, in particular exploring linkages with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. There was also a discussion on the possibility of examining the impact of indicators on each other.

- 5. What do you see as the potential usages of an overarching well-being Framework for policymakers, researchers, and community & local initiatives? How might it help shape a different approach?**

Participants highlighted the importance of the Wellbeing Framework being actively used as a tool in the policymaking process, and the importance of political leadership in this endeavour was emphasised. Regular formal reporting on the Framework, including its use as a tool to inform future national debates and long-term planning on infrastructure and environmental issues, was suggested.

It was highlighted that the Framework has the potential to support strategic coherence in policy (both vertical and horizontal) across Government, civil society and community.

The importance of embedding the Framework across all Departments was emphasised.

Suggestions included:

- incorporating clear commitments into further reporting to strengthen the influence of the framework

- measurement and reporting on adherence to international guidelines
- use as a tool in appraisals which can be skewed towards economic outputs.

The dashboard should be used as a comparison tool internationally. It could also be used as a resource for smaller organisations. It was highlighted that too many indicators could reduce coherence and create difficulties in driving policy.