



REPORT OF THE FIRST RURAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY NOVEMBER 2021

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Abbreviations

CNN	Comhairle na nÓg
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
NPO	National Participation Office
YAG	Youth Advisory Group

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Executive Summary

Recommendations

On the 28th November 2021 the Rural Youth Assembly made the following recommendations to the Minister for Rural and Community Development for consideration within the current work programme of *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025*.

1. Improve Transport Links

<i>What is the problem?</i>	<i>What needs to happen?</i>	<i>What difference will this make?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor public transport reduces access to services locally, more cars are used, causing congestion. • Available buses are either too early in the mornings or too late in the evenings. • Poor roads mean long travel times from rural areas into towns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make improving public transport for young people a key priority for Government. • Reliable, sustainable public transport. • Improve roads and pavements in rural areas • Affordable car ownership, fuel prices, insurance, tax etc. • More bike lanes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections to local villages and towns, access to local services and facilities, commuting to work/college • Reduce our carbon footprint • Reliable transport improves access to employment. • Improved roads will improve public transport by bus. • Cycle paths to access local services.

2. Improve connectivity and broadband

<i>What is the problem?</i>	<i>What needs to happen?</i>	<i>What difference will this make?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wi-Fi and broadband are valuable resources – in most rural areas it is not good enough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to broadband in rural areas. • More reliable broadband in people's homes (not just business) by providing grants to reduce the cost of broadband. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would help working from home in rural areas (and will reduce pressure on rural roads).

3. Provide Facilities

<i>What is the problem?</i>	<i>What needs to happen?</i>	<i>What difference will this make?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to feel welcome and want opportunities to stay in rural Ireland. • Lack of facilities and groups for young people in rural Ireland. • Existing facilities are in poor condition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More investment in spaces and places for young people in rural Ireland • Fund more rural youth groups • More community facilities • Improve existing community centres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities to stay in rural Ireland by feeling welcome. • This will relieve stress and effects of mental health. • Improved facilities for young people with special needs • Reduce underage drinking, smoking and drug use.

4. Support Community Cohesion

<i>What is the problem?</i>	<i>What needs to happen?</i>	<i>What difference will this make?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for more education on minority communities e.g., LGBTI+, ethnic minorities, age. • There is a gap in understanding between the generations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education on minorities including educate the educators • Sensitivity training for adults, older generation, teachers, guidance counsellors • Designated week in school. • Intergenerational groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a sense of community and belonging, reduce underage drinking, smoking and drug use. • Encourage people to stay in or return to rural communities • Increase acceptance and understanding

The Rural Youth Assembly 2021

The first Rural Youth Assembly, hosted by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), and facilitated by the National Participation Office (NPO), was held online in November 2021. The Assembly consisted of 35 young people living in rural areas, aged between 12-18 years, from across Ireland. The NPO worked with a Youth Advisory Group of 12 young people to co-design the online interactive Assembly.

A total 47 young people (12 in the Youth Advisory Group and 35 at the assembly) aged between 12 and 18 years participated in the discussions. The young people came from 14 counties (Carlow, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Leitrim, Limerick, Longford, Louth, Mayo, Roscommon, and Waterford) and included young people from Comhairle na nÓg and from youth organisations around the country. Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman T.D. opened the Assembly and welcomed the delegates, thanking them for their time.

The Assembly explored young people’s experiences of living in rural Ireland, identified how life might be improved, and agreed some recommendations for action. Young delegates discussed the importance of social connections in rural areas and the benefits of close-knit communities. They expressed an immense pride in rural Ireland, making particular reference to the beauty of the countryside and the quality of life. In response to what could be better about life in rural Ireland, the young delegates identified six themes:

1. The need to improve infrastructure
2. More opportunities (e.g., education, jobs, economic development)
3. More facilities and amenities in rural areas
4. Education about other communities
5. Greater participation and inclusion (e.g., a greater voice, education about other cultures)
6. Other (e.g., protecting the farming community, promotion/protection of Irish language)

From these themes they agreed on four final recommendations as set out above. In discussing their future plans to stay in rural Ireland, many of the young delegates felt they would prefer to stay, or return to rural Ireland after college, and emphasised that their recommendations would make a future in rural Ireland feasible for them.

Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys T.D., responded to the recommendations:

“Today’s event was the first of its kind and provided a unique opportunity for young people right across the country to have their say on issues affecting Rural Ireland. It is important to hear directly from our young people as they are best placed to give their views on how to improve the quality of life for those growing up in our rural communities. I am delighted to have been able to engage directly with the participants on how we can revitalise Rural Ireland and make our communities better places to live, work, grow up in and raise a family. It also gave me an opportunity to tell them about ‘Our Rural Future’, which is already having a really positive impact in our rural towns and villages. I congratulate the young people who I met today and encourage them to continue to be active voices in their rural communities. They are the people who will make the difference.”

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

'[Our Rural Future](#)', is the whole-of-government policy for rural Ireland for the period 2021-2025. It represents a new milestone in the approach to rural development policy for Ireland and adopts a more strategic, ambitious, and holistic approach to investing in and maximising opportunities for rural areas. The policy framework contains over 150 measures for delivery over the lifetime of the policy, for both short-term recovery and longer-term development.

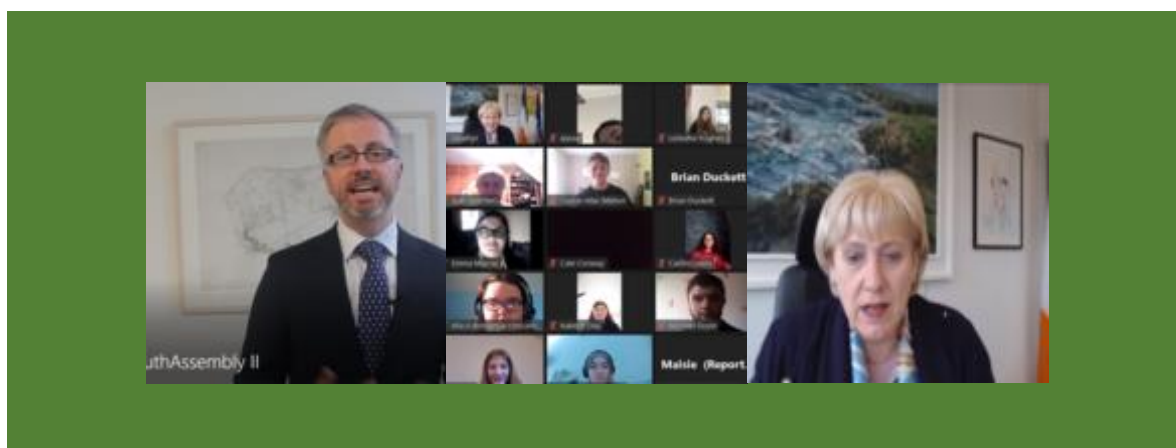
A key commitment in Our Rural Future, and one that is also referenced in the Programme for Government, is the establishment of a **Rural Youth Assembly**, which will allow young people in rural Ireland to identify and influence policy issues that impact on them and their futures. It is intended that the Rural Youth Assembly will convene annually, although its composition may change from year to year to potentially include different age cohorts.

The Government recognises the importance of having an inclusive policy-making process and one which includes representation of children and young people. As people are best placed to give their views on how to progress rural development, the Rural Youth Assembly will act as a vehicle for dialogue and will assist in the development of proposals or recommendations. Such proposals will be explored as possible measures for inclusion in future annual Work Programmes to be delivered under the Policy.

It is also hoped that the Assembly will build the leadership capacity of young people within their communities to better equip them to be able to contribute their thoughts and ideas on how to best pursue rural development and how to retain and attract young people to live and work in different rural areas. By hearing from young people and children, this project will allow insight into some of the concerns facing young people and assist in the identification of potential improvements .

1.2 The Rural Youth Assembly

In November 2021, the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) in partnership with the National Participation Office hosted the first Rural Youth Assembly to explore young people's views on what would keep and attract young people to live and work in rural areas.



The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman T.D. welcomed the young people to the event and emphasised the Government's commitment to listening to children's and young people's views.

‘Today is a proud moment for me as Minister marking this first step in realising commitments we made in the Programme for Government 2020 to establish Youth Assemblies. I am very happy to support Minister Humphreys in seeing through this commitment from ‘Our Rural Future’ to include the voice of young people in policymaking. Young people made history today, as the first Rural Youth Assembly, which we aim to be an annual event. Today marks the beginning of a whole new chapter for our Government in hearing the voice of young people in Ireland.’

SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

To design and implement the online assembly, the DRCD and DCEDIY worked in partnership with the National Participation Office (see Appendix 1 for membership of the Project Group who designed and/or facilitated the consultation). Following best practice and guided by recently published Participation Framework¹, the Participation Team's took measures to maximise the voice of the young person, ensuring they were fully informed on the reason for the assembly and how the findings would be used.

The starting point for this was the establishment of a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) of 10 young people who helped co-design the consultation. The Participation Team drafted an online interactive consultation methodology which was piloted with the YAG, who shared their views and opinions on each of the proposed consultation questions² and provided feedback on methodology for the Rural Youth Assembly.

2.2 The Format of the first Rural Youth Assembly

The event was conducted virtually using the Zoom platform. The participants were welcomed to the Assembly by Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister Roderic O'Gorman.

The consultation was split into four activities (see Box 1 below) to explore the experience of living in rural Ireland, to identify how life could be improved, and to agree some recommendations for action.

Box 1: Rural Youth Assembly 28th November 2022

Activity 1 used **Open Space** to explore two questions:

- **What are the good things about life in rural Ireland?**
- **What could be better about life in rural Ireland?**

Activity 2: World Café approach to gain a deeper understanding of the key issues identified by the young people.

Activity 3: In the third activity, the young people identified recommendations and actions that might be taken under each of the four topics. For recommendations participants focused on three questions.

- **What is the problem?**
- **What needs to happen?**
- **What difference this will make?**

Activity 4: Future proofing rural Ireland.

- **Do you see a future in rural Ireland?**
 - **What can be done?**

¹ <https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/>

² During the pilot the young people shared the views on the questions asked, the findings from these discussions have been integrated within the findings from the full event on the 28th November.

2.3 Who participated?

To capture a broad geographic spread, the Comhairle na nÓg Participation Co-ordinator extended invitations to local Comhairlí na nÓg and to other youth organisations (see Appendix 2 for organisations), specifically targeting young people living in rural areas and seldom heard young people. The 35 young people who took part came from 14 counties (Carlow, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Leitrim, Limerick, Longford, Louth, Mayo, Roscommon, and Waterford).

- Youth Advisory Group (1): n=8 aged 14-17 years Youth Advisory Group (2): n=4
- Rural Youth Assembly: n=35 aged 12-18 years

As part of their introductions at the beginning of the Assembly, the young people were asked to briefly describe the area where they live. The descriptions included:

- an Island (n=5)
- a very isolated rural area (n=8)
- small village (n=10)
- town (n=10) or large town (n=2).

2.4 Data recording

To ensure the views of young people were accurately recorded and presented, an independent report writer was commissioned to record the deliberations and to prepare a report outlining the young people's views and recommendations

The discussions in each of the breakout rooms were recorded on the Padlet software (Activity 1 & Activity 3) and by the independent note takers.

SECTION 3: MESSAGES FROM THE FORUM

3.1 Activity 1: Open Space Activity

Box 2 Activity 1: Open Space

After the introduction to the consultation and the Youth Rural Assembly, the young people were split into smaller breakout rooms to explore two questions.

Question 1a: What are the good things about life in rural Ireland?

Question 1b: What could be better about life in rural Ireland?

Before starting the discussion, the facilitator used icebreaker activities to place participants at ease with each other and with the online forum.

To begin the Open Space session, the facilitator asked participants to write down their thoughts on (a) the good things about life in rural Ireland and (b) what could be better in rural Ireland. They were then invited to share the three most important answers to each question on the online **Padlet**³ screen. At the end of this session, participants in each room voted on the category they would like to discuss in next session.

Participants were invited to add their responses to the questions on a shared Padlet screen. When the young people were adding to the shared Padlet page, the facilitators commenced grouping the responses into similar themes. The young people reviewed these groupings, before labelling the themes and discussing them further (see Figure 1 for example of completed Padlet screen).

3.1.1 Question 1a: What are the good things about life in rural Ireland?

In response to the question on the good things about living in rural areas, it was evident across all of the groups that the young people were extremely appreciative of the quality of life associated with living in rural communities (e.g. social aspects of rural life, sense of community) and have an immense pride in rural Ireland particularly the beauty of the countryside (see Appendix 2 for summary of participants' views on what is good about life in rural Ireland).

As might be expected there was some overlap in the categories of topics discussed in each of the four groups.

³ [Padlet](#) is an online application that allows participants to privately add views and ideas to a shared screen.

Figure 1: Example of Padlet from Activity 1

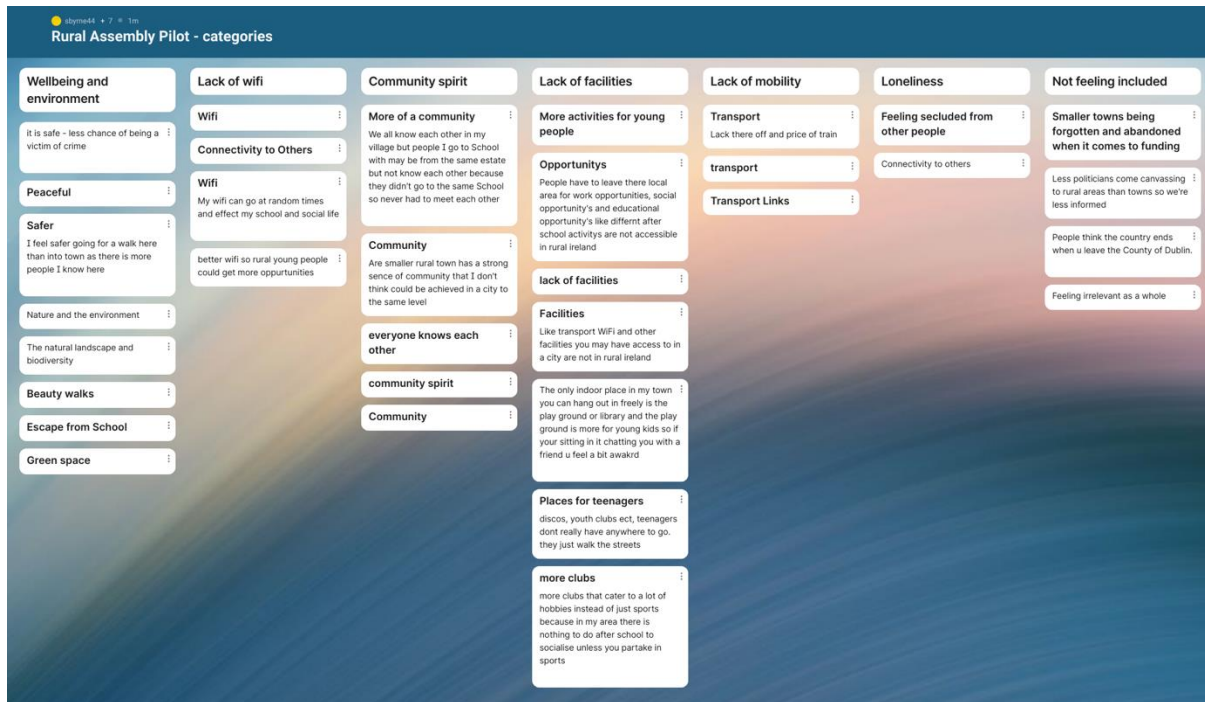


Table 1: Participants' categorisations of their responses to *What is good about life in rural Ireland?* (Activity 1) (Grouped by breakout room)

<p>Group 1</p> <p>Strong community connections</p> <p>Benefits of nature</p>	<p>Group 2</p> <p>Social aspects of rural life</p> <p>Benefits of nature</p>
<p>Group 3</p> <p>Community, heritage, traditional skills, and Irish language</p> <p>Safe, peaceful</p> <p>Nature</p>	<p>Group 4</p> <p>Tightly knit community, less crime, people are nicer, you know your neighbours more</p> <p>Benefits of nature</p>

The report writer has merged some categories into themes to capture the essence of the discussions in each Group (see Appendix 3 Table 2a & Table 2b for further detail). Taken together the young people's thoughts on what is good about rural Ireland encapsulate three broad themes:

- A sense of community
- The beauty of Ireland and benefits of nature
- The culture and heritage

A sense of community

The friendliness of the rural community was a dominant message across all groups. Some young people elaborated on specific features of the rural community that made the difference.

'People are generally nicer as in a smaller community everyone knows each other.'

'You get to know everybody very well.'

For some young people, it was having extended family members living close by. It was evident that the young people had an intense sense of pride in their neighbourhoods. For others it was being part of the farming community.

Young people in one of the groups talked about the benefits of the smaller schools, which they considered contributing to a better education due to smaller class sizes.

In all five groups the young people identified the freedom and relative safety as the benefits of living in rural Ireland.

The beauty of Ireland and benefits of nature

The beauty of rural Ireland was the second dominant benefit of living in rural Ireland. They described the benefits of living with nature and the general tranquillity of rural life on general wellbeing.

*'Kids are usually very safe; they get to run around freely.
You can go to the beach every day. It's free and it's natural.'*

'Generally better place to grow up more space and fresh air.'

Related to the peacefulness of rural life, a couple of young people mentioned the relevant absence of pollution and the relative safety of life in the country.

'Minimal traffic.'

'Less noise pollution.'

'No big buildings'

The culture and heritage

Young people in one group were also appreciative of their culture and heritage, particularly the Irish language.

‘I’m from the Gaeltacht, Irish is my first language. I think that’s a really cool part of living in rural Ireland. It’s a unique aspect of my life and an important part of who I am. It couldn’t be that if I lived in a city.’

‘So much more peaceful and quite old fashioned, and there are loads of professions that you don’t have in cities. Stone walls – there are specific ways to build them. And people still make the Galway Hookers.’

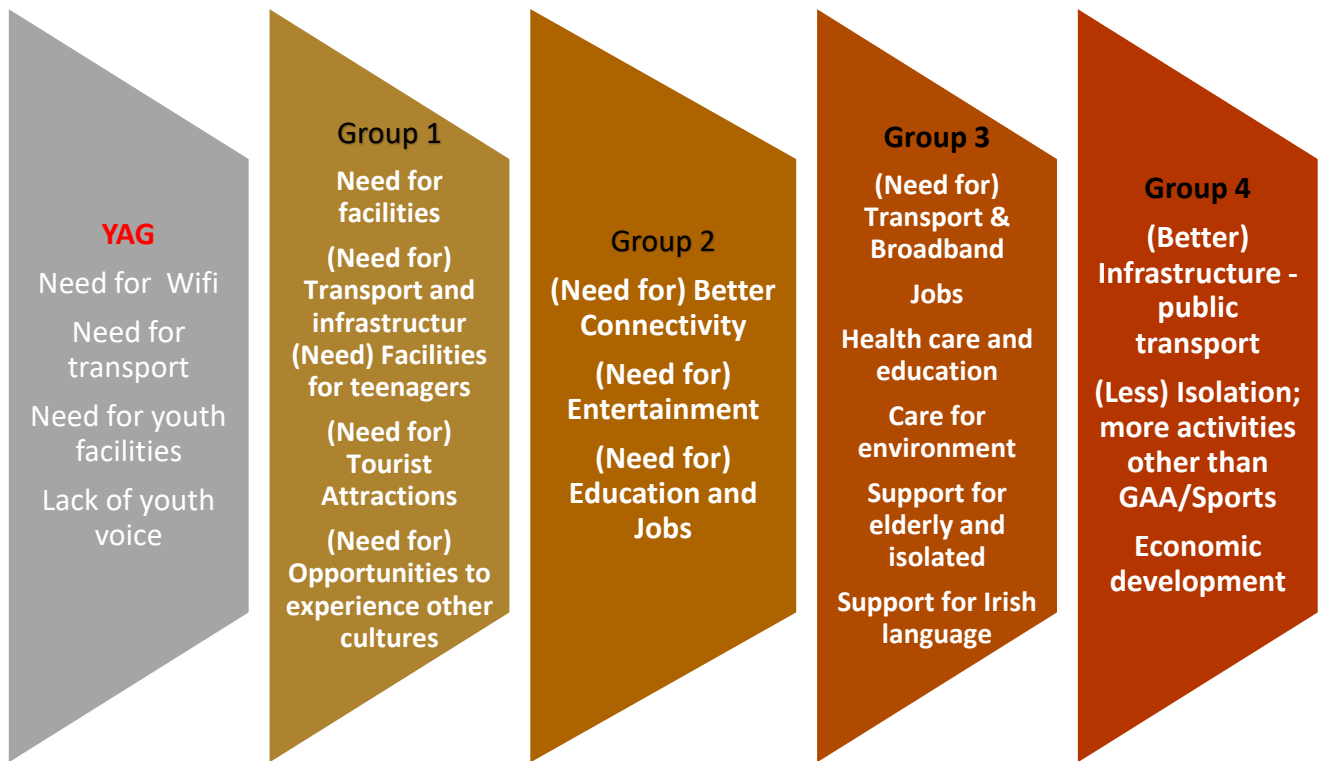
‘There should be more public walked around the farms to see the view.’

3.1.2 Question 1b: What could be better about life in Rural Ireland?

Participants’ categorisations of their responses to the question on how life in rural Ireland might be improved are presented in Table 2. Their categories fall into five themes:

- Infrastructure
- Lack of facilities and amenities
- Education about other communities
- Participation and inclusion (e.g., a greater voice, education about other cultures)
- Other (e.g., protecting the farming community, promotion/protection of Irish language)

Table 2: Participants' categorisation of their responses to *What could be better about life in rural Ireland* (Activity 1)



Infrastructure

Within the broad theme of infrastructure, young people identified the need for improvements in:

- Connectivity (transport and broadband)
- The roads
- Employment, education, and training

The absence or lack of **reliable public transport** was a dominant theme in all five groups and was also prioritised by the groups as a topic for greater discussion in the second activity (Activity 2 World Café – Section 3.2). Related to the issue of public transport, the poor condition of the roads in rural areas was described by one group as contributing to the unreliable bus system and to the longer commutes to larger towns.

Poor or limited broadband was also raised in all five groups. The absence of reliable internet was described as a barrier to engaging in school/college, as well as limiting remote working opportunities. This theme was discussed in more detail in the World Café activity.

Not having jobs or opportunities to match people's level of education was identified as a major drawback to keeping people in rural communities. In one group, some of the young people felt this absence of career opportunities in rural Ireland discouraged children and young people from focusing on school and doing well with their education. The absence of work opportunities was also viewed by the young people as a contributor to the brain drain from rural communities.

'Your education level doesn't affect what kind of job you can get if you stay'

'If you have a really good education, you have no choice but to leave. You can't stay in rural areas. You have to travel.'

'If you have a really good education, you have to leave to get a really good job.'

Lack of facilities and amenities

Across the five groups, the young people identified the lack of facilities and amenities in rural areas as one of the main downsides to living in rural communities. This included the lack of:

- general amenities (i.e. shops, healthcare)
- lack of places for youth to socialise

This theme was also voted by the groups to be discussed in the World Café activity (see Section 3.2.2 for further detail).

Education about other communities

The young people in one of the groups discussed the need to educate people about minority communities such as LGBTI+ people and those with different ethnicities and cultures. Young people in one group discussed the need for a greater understanding of native Irish speakers and the importance of preserving the Irish language and culture.

'Both the preservation of the language itself and further development towards expanding the native population. More needs to be done in terms of education and teaching Irish properly rather than relying on summer courses.'

Participation and Inclusion (e.g., a greater voice, feeling welcomed)

Related to the need for education about minority communities, the need for greater inclusion was raised in two of the groups. This theme included the need to have a greater voice in decision making, but also action to reduce social exclusion and isolation in rural communities.

Other topics discussed in group but not featured on Padlet

In one group, two young people discussed some of the challenges facing the farming community. One mentioned that compared to the past, the cost of farming has increased due to the increased cost of everything. Another mentioned the risks to farming due to increased flooding as well as rising costs of raising and selling animals.

During the recommendations exercise (see Section 3.3), two comments were made on the Padlet about the growing disregard for the environment, and then the discussion moved on to the next topic. However, the young people continued to discuss issues relating to the environment among themselves in the chatbox:

‘Farming practices are very destructive a lot of times, silage wrap all around the place, litter, mistreatment of animals is scarily common in west Cork at least.’

‘Tyres are a big dumping problem.’

‘{Name of place} is a nature reserve near us and is protected as a place of European interest and tourists absolutely destroy it. Tents, litter, campfires, bag and bags of rubbish.’

3.1.3 Prioritisation of topics discussed

At the end of the session, the young people in each breakout room were asked to indicate on an online poll the topics they would like to have discussed further using a ranking scale (5 indicates favourite and 1 least favourite). Table 3 provides a summary of the top 2 votes for each group.

Table 3: Top 2 votes for topics sorted by Group (for Activity 2)

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
1.Social Issues /Amenities	1. Connectivity (broadband/transport)	1. Infra-structure (Wi-Fi, jobs, resources)	1. Infra-structure/Transport /Economic development
2.Friendships	2. Entertainment /Amenities	2. Lack of education on social issues	2. Participation and inclusion – finding your tribe.

3.2 Activity 2: World Café

In the second activity, the World Café, the young people discussed the four prioritised topics in greater detail. The four topics were:

- Topic 1: Connectivity/Transport
- Topic 2: Lack of Amenities
- Topic 3: Education on other communities
- Topic 4: Participation and Inclusion

Each facilitator was assigned one of the four topics to explore in more depth with the young people in each of the four breakout rooms. The facilitator spent 15 minutes with the first breakout group,

and 10 minutes with each of the remaining groups. Each of the breakout rooms had a second facilitator and note taker who remained with the group for all four discussions.

When entering the room, the facilitator asked the group to consider three questions on the topic.

- **What makes this an important topic?**
- **What are the barriers for young people?**
- **What can be done to solve this?**

3.2.1 Topic 1: Connectivity and Transport

The importance of connectivity and transport was raised in all five groups. During the World Café activity, the facilitators asked focused questions to gain a better understanding of how the issues impact on life in rural Ireland, and what actions might be taken to improve the situation. Table 4(a) provides a summary of the responses from the five groups. For this topic, the young people discussed three sub-topics:

- Regular and reliable public transport
- The poor condition of rural roads
- Wi-Fi and broadband

Table 4 (a) In depth discussion on Connectivity and Transport

Topic 1: Connectivity /Transport	Sub-topic	Detail
<i>What makes it so important?</i>	Public transport Regular and reliable transport	To access services and facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To access general facilities and services (e.g., shops, healthcare etc) • To access education, training, and employment • To access youth facilities in towns • Not just about cars/buses but also boats and connection to islands
	Roads	Poor roads mean it takes a lot longer to get places
	Wi-Fi Broadband	To stay connected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To access online college/school and to work remotely • To keep connected (e.g., family living abroad, friends/social network) • Pressure on families when adults working from home & young people studying – need to prioritise who accesses Wi-Fi
	<i>What are the barriers to young people?</i>	Public Transport <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buses have limited timetables (very early in am and late return pm – means long days) that do not suit young people’s needs • Unreliable transport buses often running late • School transport ‘shocking’ and expensive – many parents choose to drive instead • Transport options not environmentally friendly – e-cars not feasible • Where good transport is available it is the high cost to commute Island access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some young people living on islands must stay on mainland during the week to access school • YP have little time with family due to boat timetable
	Roads	Roads are dangerous for cycling
	Wi-Fi Broadband	Poor broadband creates disadvantage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor connectivity – not reliable broadband to work from home • Not dependable for online school • (High cost in more remote areas (working from hotspots) means less well-off families cannot access to the same extent

Topic 1: Connectivity /Transport	Sub-topic	Detail
<i>What can be done to solve this?</i> <i>What can Gov. do?</i>	Transport	Plan public transport to match school/college starting times (e.g., change the timetables to suit most) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to large towns cities. More regular bus with linked timetables to school/college starting times) • More public transport to/from internet hubs • More green transport options • Allow more home working to reduce the need to commute
	Roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the roads • Provide (safe) cycle routes
	Wi-Fi – Broadband	Improve broadband/internet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheaper / offer grants • Faster / reliable broadband - efficient (for homes) • Supply boosters

The need for regular and reliable public transport

The young people described regular and reliable transport as essential to participating in all activities across their lifespan (i.e., not just for children and young people). It was viewed to be important to access education (school and colleges), training, work, healthcare, social and economic activities. The young people described limited or sparse public transport in the rural Ireland. Where public transport was available it was often late and expensive for regular commutes.

In my area there is only 1 bus per week. If people could choose from options they would be more connected.

We have transport every hour. The problem is the cost of this transport. €60 a week to travel to school which is hard for a student.

Transport can be late, and I often miss important lectures and classes.

School transport was described as ‘shocking and expensive,’ with many parents opting to drive children to school. The young people were also concerned about the environmental impact of the need to rely on personal transport (often no e-cars) rather than sustainable public transport.

School transport cost is shocking. Depend on parents for a lift. Better off in the car.

Young people living in the islands talked about the limited ferry options to access education on the mainland, with some needing to take accommodation on the mainland during the school terms.

There are only two sailings a day and I only get home on weekends. On Fridays I finish school at 1.20pm and I don't get home until 8.30pm.

The poor condition of rural roads

Related to the issue of unreliable transport, the young people discussed the poor state of rural roads. This meant slow commutes to local towns, contributing to the unreliable bus service. The poor conditions of the roads also limited young people's cycling to access local facilities.

Broadband and Wi-Fi

Poor broadband in rural Ireland was also a dominant theme across the five groups. Similar to transport, reliable broadband was considered essential to engage in education, training, and work. In the absence of local facilities to meet and socialise, good access to broadband/Wi-Fi plays a vital role in maintaining social networks and keeping contact with family and friends who have moved out of the area.

Young people described several barriers to accessing efficient broadband which creates disadvantages for people living in rural areas. For example, some described the poor connectivity during lockdown which had impact on their online learning. Some young people experienced difficulties connecting to the unreliable broadband/Wi-Fi and were concerned that this may not have been taken into consideration in exams and assessments.

Wi-Fi generally not a problem but during lockdown with my sister working from home the Wi-Fi kept cutting out.

During lockdown I had no Wi-Fi, and the hotspot didn't work. This didn't help with my education. Certain parts of education don't realise how this loss of classes due to Covid 19. This combined with late buses – it all adds up

Others identified the high cost of reliance on hotspots for Wi-Fi in more remote areas (in areas without broadband) which means less well-off families do not have the same access as those who could afford to use hotspots to access internet.

My group of friends have to come to my house seven days a week as we have the best Wi-Fi in the area.

In one group, one young person talked about the effect of a reliance on online learning

Full day online for a few months was draining.

There was a lack of boundaries, never the relief of coming home.

Suggestions for improvements

Across all five groups the young people offered several suggestions to address the difficulties in transport and connectivity. These included:

- Improved public transport in rural areas
 - More regular buses (plan timetables to match school/college starting times)
 - More green forms of transport
 - Have transport to internet hubs
- Improve the roads in rural areas/provide cycle paths
- Allow more remote working (which would also take pressure off rural roads)
- Improve broadband
 - Set up community hubs where we can access the internet
 - Cheaper/faster broadband for work and homes
 - Give grants and supply free/low-cost boosters for homes

3.2.2 Topic 2: Lack of Facilities

Why access to facilities and amenities is important for young people in rural Ireland

All the young people identified the need for improved access to facilities and amenities in rural areas. Having no or little choice in social activities and leisure was discussed across all four groups. One young person contrasted the options available to young people living in larger towns and cities.

In towns there's lots of activities, Comhairle na nÓg, Scouts, Foróige, youth services, etc. and the countryside lacks things like that.

The reasons the issue of access to facilities was important to young people was the opportunities they offered to make new friends, and to integrate into the community. Facilities were viewed to be important to secure social connection and to reduce the risk of social isolation. The lockdown and the reliance on online engagement for social connections had highlighted the importance of physical spaces for young people to meet.

In the area we live it is all about football. We need choice and within a shorter framework.

Apart from sport, predominantly GAA, the young people talked about the lack of choice of activities in rural areas. Some felt there was less enthusiasm to fund alternative sporting and leisure activities. One group felt that the adult decision makers (i.e., government, councils) have neglected the needs of the younger generation in rural Ireland, and communities must fight hard for funding.

People talk about youth clubs, but nothing happens. We hang around down at the park as this is the only place to hang out.

Young people described needing to hang out on street corners or in old buildings, which results in them being judged by adults. They described having nowhere to meet up when it is raining. They sometimes get 'lumped in' with children or are told to use existing services (e.g., they get moved on from playparks). Young people aged between 16-18 years described how they fall between services, too old for youth clubs and too young for pubs.

In our village there used to be a group for young people but it has been changed – the venue is being used for something else.

In our town we have a park, we go down there when we are waiting for study or other activities but there are small kids, and we are being warned not to hang out there. Pre-Covid we were allowed to hang out in home economics room (in school), but we can't do this anymore. We need a youth café.

Hard to meet new people as we are too young to go to the pubs and too old to go to playgrounds/youth clubs etc.

Some local towns offer some opportunities and amenities for young people, but the limited transport options are a barrier to accessing them. Some young people noted that where facilities exist, they can be unwelcoming, run-down and neglected, without heating etc. Such facilities tend to be under-used and thus risk closure. In some areas, privately owned buildings are rented for community activities. These can be expensive.

It's all about money. The golf club owns the local hall, and they want money for use of the hall.

The young people also mentioned the importance of having facilities for young people with disabilities, mentioning the lack of disability awareness in available facilities, lifts not working, and limited funding to make services accessible.

The young people outline how the absence of places and activities to go to impacted on their lives. It increases the risk of social isolation. The lack of a release from school and exam pressures increased the risk of poor mental health. Having no alternatives also increased the risk of boredom and vandalism, teenage drinking, and smoking, which in turn adds to adults' negative perceptions of teenagers.

Adults perceive young people as a threat or nuisance.

In one group, the young people discussed the wider communities' need for facilities and amenities. They talked about the lack of shops with little or no competition meaning prices were much higher for people living in rural areas.

Another group made specific mention of the need to improve access to healthcare and emergency services. One young person described the need to travel two to three hours to access hospital care. One participant summed up the challenges for young people living in more rural areas.

No public transport (one bus that goes into the main town once a week), local shop very far away, not enough colleges, hospitals far away. You have to leave to access everything.

Possible solutions

As might be anticipated, the young people's suggestions of ways to improve this situation included securing specific funding to address the lack of facilities (spread throughout the country). Young people in one group suggested raising awareness of the underfunding and called for plans to entice the development of services in rural Ireland.

In terms of the types of facilities required, the need for alternatives and choice was a recurrent suggestion. Having more diverse alternatives to sport (or traditional sports) was suggested. Others suggested more afterschool activities, such as Comhairle na nÓg, Foróige etc. Given the difficulties with transport in rural Ireland, young people suggested the development of facilities close to people in rural areas or to improve the transport to allow people in rural areas to avail of facilities in the local towns.

Don't force people to have to travel for amenities.

Acknowledging the difficulties of having youth only facilities across rural communities, one group suggested greater investment in intergenerational facilities and amenities that might be used by the whole community. Where community buildings exist, ensure they are maintained (e.g., clean and warm) and are welcoming to children and young people.

Teen Café is a great concept but may not be feasible everywhere. Maybe consider intergenerational spaces/events e.g., older generations and transition years students from schools.

Make amenities available for everyone.

Improve on what we already have. Clean and heat community buildings

Another group suggested encouraging the development of social amenities e.g., bowling alleys, cinemas etc, which would provide entertainment and would create jobs.

Table 4 (b): In depth discussion on **Lack of Facilities**

Topic 2: Lack of facilities	Sub-topic	Detail
<i>What makes it so important?</i>	Lack of amenities for young people in rural areas	<p>Risk of social isolation – issues with ‘fitting in’ with others in the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people need somewhere to relax and mix • Without the opportunities to make friends, settling into a bigger community/school can be difficult • Isolation during lockdown – lack of friends and few opportunities to make them • Harder to find your clan • During pandemic young people were reliant on technology to stay connected (and poor connectivity made this difficult) <p>Nothing to do – no alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closures or underused facilities • Young people turn to drink, hanging out on street corners, boredom and vandalism, no release from school/exam pressures <p>Lack of services and attractions to keep people in the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money leaves the small towns to go to cities or abroad • Young people likely to stay in rural areas if there are facilities (e.g., entertainment) and jobs • People with disability disadvantaged because of the lack of nearby facilities • Limited healthcare / limited access to emergency services
<i>What are the barriers?</i>	Facilities and amenities for young people	<p>Rural needs not prioritised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to fight to get money to do things • Forgotten about- Government pacify us • Council not motivated to take action – e.g., young people trying to get skatepark, but it keeps getting pushed to the side • Generational divide – older people who have the power choose not to help <p>Not a lot of choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apart from sports and music not a lot of other things teenagers can do, not many after school activities • We need more youth clubs/youth cafés • Nowhere to go when it rains • GAA facilities well looked after- sports that are not popular receive less funding • 16–18 year olds fall between youth clubs and the pubs • Facilities not upgraded and groups don’t have what they need • Lack of basic facilities e.g., toilets <p>Some sport (GAA) prioritised over others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community do not support facilities a lot of the time that are not GAA

Topic 2: Lack of facilities	Sub-topic	Detail
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid- GAA matches held in Croke Park and drama/performing arts/busking were not allowed <p>Lack of age-appropriate services/facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teenagers getting lumped in with children • Negative perceptions of teenagers (e.g., graffiti etc) • Too old for playparks <p>Can't access available facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can only walk to places • Lack of reliable transport <p>Lack of accessible facilities for people with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of disability awareness in sports centres • Lack of funding to make them accessible • Lifts not working in some centres <p>Cost of available services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where activities exist e.g., maritime culture they can be very expensive

Topic 2: Lack of facilities	Sub-topic	Detail
<p><i>What can be done to solve this?</i></p> <p><i>What can Gov. do?</i></p>	<p>Amenities for young people</p>	<p>More funding for rural areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness raising of underfunding and lack of facilities at national level and in bigger counties- not everyone has the same opportunity • Spread finance throughout the whole country and not just Dublin • Organisation on a political level so that they have a plan for enticing the development of services in rural Ireland <p>Offer alternatives/choices for children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities need more funding for children who may not be interested in sport e.g. drama after school- more diverse options needed • More awareness that sport is not the only thing that's important • More afterschool activities, Comhairle, Foróige etc • More amenities for young people in their areas so they don't need to travel <p>Encourage development of amenities – e.g., bowling alleys, cinemas etc. This would provide entertainment and would create jobs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More swimming pools/cinemas • Indoor sports facilities with covered area for use in all weather <p>Improve transport to amenities in local towns to avail of local facilities</p> <p>Improve what we already have e.g., clean and heat community buildings</p> <p>Provide facilities for teens and for young people with special needs</p> <p>Develop intergenerational spaces for events for the older generation and with young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make available amenities open to all • Spaces with coffee/tea and microwave • Cafés where people can sit and chat • Social areas to book for activities

3.2.3 Topic 3: Education on other communities

Why education about other communities is important

The young people discussed the importance of understanding and acknowledgement for all minority communities. They felt that some adults and young people have closed mindsets and hold opinions that need to be challenged (e.g. racism or homophobia). One group discussed the false assumption that the younger generations are more liberal in their opinions and beliefs, but some young people use derogatory terms which can be very hurtful.

Some participants gave examples of having to deal with sexism, racism, homophobia on an ongoing basis:

I was the only girl in the x class. One of the lads used a derogatory term. I challenged him and sent him information.

As a child, I was picked on a lot. I'm 16 now and its ok now. I still get insults and it's a lot less but still there's is a need for education about how this could be hurtful.

Without acceptance, participants felt that young people in rural Ireland can feel very isolated. They provided examples of LGBTI+ young people being afraid to come out in case they are bullied or excluded. LGBTI+ young people need the opportunity to meet other LGBTI+ young people.

Generation Z understand it, but previous generations don't.

If you are any bit different, you will feel you are alone.

The young people were concerned that there is a greater risk of closed mindsets in rural communities. This mindset can result in young people growing up thinking being different is wrong, which in turn increases the risk of people moving away from rural areas.

Small community: double edged sword. If you get on, grand, but if you do not get on with them it can be very detrimental.

Possible solutions

The young people made several suggestions on ways to reduce the risk of exclusion in rural Ireland. These included education and training to make adults and communities more aware and tolerant. Suggestions included:

- Sensitivity training for adults (on LGBTI+ and ableism)
- Education for school staff including guidance counsellors (e.g., Shout Out training)
- Sensitivity training for children / young people (which needs to start early)
- Education on LGBTI+ issues and the use of pronouns.

One participant, attends a school which is accepting of the LGBTI+ community, talked about the importance of education for the wider community, including parents.

Our school is very aware of LGBT issues. I have a couple of friends who are part of the LGBT community. Some parents may not fully understand what their child might be thinking.

There is a need to talk and raise awareness for adults. Teenagers understand it. Most of the problems are because of the adults in their lives

Other suggestions included inviting LGBTI+ speakers to speak in different workplaces (e.g., as part of Pride week). Another was to provide support groups and promote and signpost the available supports.

The young people also discussed addressing the entrenched opinions and the importance of stopping aggression against minority groups by providing education on how racist insults can be hurtful.

I wish there was some way we were taught [about equality] earlier.

Table 4 (c): In depth discussion on Education about other communities

Topic 3: Education on other communities	Sub topic	Detail
<i>What makes it so important?</i>	Education about LGBTI+ issues	Understanding and acknowledgement would mean so much to some pupils. Adults need to be educated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents need to be educated • Teachers need to be educated (teachers need more training to ensure their efforts don't cause distress to LGBTI+ pupils)
		Assumption is that younger generation is more liberal, but many have opinions that need to be challenged (e.g., racist / homophobic) Young people can use derogatory terms that can hurt Young people need to get to know more <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people afraid to come out because of bullying • LGBTI+ need to the opportunity to meet other LGBTI+ • Impact on mental health
		Closed mindsets drive people out of rural areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing attitudes takes a lot longer in rural areas • Without education people grow up thinking different is wrong • Can't meet similar people e.g., LGBTI+
	Irish as first language	Lack of awareness that Irish is first language on Gaeltacht areas
<i>What are the barriers to young people?</i>		Nothing in schools to make it easier from people from minority groups
		Young people are treated differently
<i>What can be done to solve this?</i> <i>What can Gov. do?</i>	LGBTI+ awareness	To make adults and communities more aware and tolerant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity training for adults • Education for school staff including guidance counsellors (e.g., Shout Out training) • Sensitivity training for children / young people (<i>to start from a young age</i>) • Workplaces inviting LGBTI+ speakers for Pride week • Support groups in local towns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promotion and signposting to available supports
	Address racism	Stop aggression to minority groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education on how racist insults can be hurtful
	Support native Irish Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More focus on native Irish speakers and resources to accommodate this. • More focus on the language and on teenagers who speak Irish.

3.2.4 Topic 4: Participation and Inclusion

Why participation and inclusion are important in rural Ireland

Reflecting the discussions on the importance of education on other communities, the young people's discussions on participation and inclusion centred on the importance of young people feeling included and being part of a community. One young person described this as being able to 'find your clan'. Young people also talked about the need to feel accepted and included in their community. Without this, they felt young people may not want to remain in rural Ireland.

One young person recounted their experience of moving to rural Ireland from a large city, and the initial sense of isolation and loneliness.

I moved from {NAME OF CITY} where I was at a big school. I moved to a small primary school with only four pupils in my class. I felt very isolated.

Others talked about the anxiety of moving from rural primary schools with small numbers of pupils to larger secondary schools.

I definitely think it is important, in my last school there was only two people, a 12-year-old and a 13 year old. I ended up being quite anxious meeting new people.

Social anxiety. I have 12 people in my primary school, it was so different going into the big school, you wouldn't have friends from other schools and cliques would form.

Some young people described being bullied and viewed differently as they come from the country.

Before I moved to where I am I had a small friendship group, but the friends didn't go to the same secondary school. The students in the new school are 'townies' and I was described as a 'culchie'.

In one group the young people talked about the challenges associated with attending close knit primary schools where many of the pupils are related or close neighbours.

Cliques are really strong and it's hard to move from one to the other. I hear people from cities saying , if you're bullied just move school. You can't do that here.

There is 40 people in the staff in my school and 30 would be cousins and 10 are neighbours.

Suggestions for improvement

Young people's suggestions for improvement echoed those recommended in Topics 2 and 3, and included:

- Education
- More opportunities to mix
- Provision of support
- Greater involvement in decision making

Similar to Topic 3 (Education on other communities), young people's initial suggestions focused on the role of education in creating a more welcoming community. The starting point was the education of the educators and adult role-models on a range of issues such as sexualities, disability, ethnicity, and nationalities.

It's from the adults, the teachers, the parents that young people are going to be educated in these sort of things if they are not educated there's no real hope.

The young people felt that this would not just help the community, the young people, but also adults and minorities everywhere.

The next suggestion was to provide more opportunities to mix. The messages here reflected those offered with Topic 2 (Lack of facilities) and included more opportunities for the generations to educate each other (e.g., Intergenerational activities) and more after school activities. The young people in one group reflected on some ways they connect with their community, and the benefits of doing this.

Myself and friends got involved in the Local Tidy Town group. This has been massive connecting with the community. Feeling of 'this is where I am from'.

Such activities would provide opportunities to learn about different groups. Within this context, the young people described the benefits they had gained from attending such activities.

My Comhairle is an hour away. If I hadn't joined I wouldn't have got an insight into some of the sub groups I'm in. If I hadn't (joined) I would still be in {Name of place} and feel isolated.

Being able to interact with other people can be really important for people to have a sense of community and understanding of themselves and learn about other cultures.

In terms of activities outside school, if you are interested in GAA you automatically have a team. In rural Ireland people are generally friendly so if there were other groups outside GAA e.g., arts, etc that would be great.

As well as creating more opportunities for young people to mix, one group highlighted the importance of providing support for young people who might feel isolated and alone. One participant mentioned the benefits of providing online support (e.g., SpunOut’s virtual space) as well as physical spaces for young people to interact.

Youth Participation

Within the topic of participation and inclusion, one group discussed the importance of general participation and having a voice on matters important to them.

We'll have to suffer/endure the consequences in the long run so ensure that we are heard.

Young people’s suggestions for ways of giving young people a greater voice in decision making included:

- The continued funding of Comhairle na nÓg
- Continue to listen to young rural people
 - This assembly
 - Use methods such as surveys or an email to allow young people to have constant communication
 - Signpost children and young people to organisations (e.g., county council) to have their voice heard at local level
 - Provide feedback on consultations and events
 - Having more events and keeping the promises made at them.

Table 4 (d): In depth discussion on Participation & inclusion

Topic 4: Participation & inclusion	Subtopic	Detail	
What makes it so important?	To feel included and welcomed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving from small rural school to big secondary school can be isolating • Friends influence how you are as a person. A good network can change your life • People tend to stay in their own groups. • It is important to have a sense of community • To understand self and others • It is really important not to be isolated, leads to not having the social skills to get to know people. • We need to develop essential social skills. • Important for mental health. <p>Important not to feel different</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to be viewed as a ‘culchie’ • Not to be excluded (impact of cliques can lead to social anxiety) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No friends in secondary school ○ Not to be isolated, lack of belonging <p>School staff are relatives and neighbours If bullied in local school, there are no options (cannot move to another school)</p> <p>Risk of migration – if feeling isolated – then the only hope is to move out of community</p>	
	Not having our voice heard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need our voices heard as much as adults 	
	Limited opportunities/ Youth facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside school where can you make friends? • Important to have a choice of amenities • Social/youth groups gives us access to different groups – expands options and increases awareness • You can feel isolated unless you can access youth groups in local towns • Poor transport means it is difficult to participate in available activities in larger towns 	
	What are the barriers to young people?	Feeling unwelcomed/ different	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving from small country schools to large secondary schools – viewed as ‘culchie’ • Moving from city school with lots of friends – feeling isolated • Moving from small primary school (only girl in class) to mixed-sex secondary school – not accepted
		Lack of facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not knowing people attending activities • Need to have the numbers before activities are offered • Not having options apart from GAA • Not enough choice
		Not having our view heard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not having access to the decision makers

<p><i>What can be done to solve this?</i></p> <p><i>What can Gov. do?</i></p>	To feel included and welcomed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More intergenerational activities e.g., Tidy town • More after school activities (see Topic 2 – facilities) • [Find a] easier way to integrate outsiders into community to make people feel welcome • Having an option of social / youth groups gives opportunities to learn about different groups • Provide more support for those who feel alone to find other people who are also alone/isolated. For example, SpunOut.ie has a virtual space for people to meet
	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide space for young people to meet. (see Topic 2 for additional suggestions)
	Having our view heard	<p>Do not make decisions without consulting children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More youth assemblies • Consult with children and young people e.g., via surveys in schools, zoom meetings • Signpost children and young people on how to contact local council

3.3 Activity 3: Recommendations to Minister

Activity 3: Identifying and Prioritising Recommendations

What should the Government's key priorities be for young people in rural Ireland?

This activity was designed to identify and prioritise recommendations for actions.

The young people in each breakout room were invited to make recommendations on Padlet. There was no limit on the number of recommendations the young people could submit, but each recommendation should only have "one idea."

Voting

To help select **TWO** recommendations from each breakout room, the young people **could 'like' up to four recommendations. The two recommendations that received the most votes were selected.**

3.3.1 Activity 3 Recommendations for the Government

Each group identified two recommendations they would like the Government to prioritise for young people in rural Ireland. See Appendix 4 for example of completed Padlet screen.

Two dominant recommendations emerged from the voting:

- **Facilities and amenities**
 - Improve local facilities was selected by **all groups.**
- **Transport and connectivity**
 - Improve transport was selected by **Group 1,2,4**
 - Improve broadband selected by **Group 2.**
 - Improve roads selected by **Group 3 & 4**

Two groups (Group 3 & Group 4) prioritised a recommendation to improve education on other communities.

- **Education on other communities** selected by **Group 3 & 4.**

Tables 5a to 5c provide an overview of the recommendations voted on by the Rural Youth Assembly.

Table 5 (a) Prioritised Recommendation 1: Transport and connectivity

Topic	Recommendation	Voted by
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Transport and Connectivity</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Transport</p> <p>What is the problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The poor public transport connectivity in rural areas means we cannot access services in local towns etc. • Where buses are available, they are either too early in the mornings or too late in the evenings. • Poor public transport means people need to use their cars which results in traffic jams at peak times. • Poor roads mean travel time from rural areas into towns take longer <p>What needs to happen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving public transport for young people should be a key priority for Government. • Improve the roads and pavements in rural areas • Have reliable sustainable public transport (e.g., arrive 9 & depart 4.30 pm) • Improve public transport i.e., better buses, trains and more frequent • Fix the roads and make it affordable to own a car, fuel prices, insurance, tax etc. • More bike lanes on the roads to local towns so we can access local services <p>What difference will this make?</p> <p>Public transport will give us links to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections to local villages and towns and access to local services and facilities e.g., afterschool, leisure etc. • Improved public transport would make it easy to commute to work/college as it would ensure people would arrive in time for college/work • Public transport will reduce our carbon footprint • If we have reliable transport the issue with jobs won't be as big. • If the roads were improved, bus/transport might improve as well • Cycle paths would mean we can access local services. 	<p>Group 1 Group 2 Group 4</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Connectivity and Broadband</p> <p>What is the problem?</p> <p>Wi-Fi and broadband are valuable resources – in most rural areas it is not good enough.</p> <p>What needs to happen?</p> <p>We need to improve connectivity in rural Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to broadband in rural areas. • More reliable broadband in people's homes (not just business) by providing grants to reduce the cost of broadband. <p>What difference would this make?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would help working from home in rural areas (and will reduce pressure on rural roads). 	<p>Group 2</p>

Table 5(b): Prioritised Recommendation 2 **Facilities**

Topic	Recommendation	Voted by
Facilities	<p><i>What is the problem?</i> Not enough facilities for young people in rural Ireland. Not enough groups for 16-18 years olds. Where there are facilities in local towns, they are not warm/clean or welcoming. We want to feel welcome and want opportunities to stay in rural Ireland</p> <p><i>What needs to happen?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More investment in young people in rural Ireland (spaces and places they can occupy) • Fund more rural youth groups so that they can continue to give youth opportunities they otherwise will not have • Funding for youth groups - such as performing art groups, etc. Groups that would not get as much funding receive more funding, equal distribution of funding. • More facilities for the community (e.g., healthcare, roads etc.) • More places for teenagers to go (e.g., Cafés, indoor social and sport spaces) and more indoor places. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make them available for everyone in community to use • Improve existing community centres by cleaning and heating them. These need to be welcoming, warm, and clean. <p><i>What difference would it make?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities to stay in rural Ireland. If we are made to feel welcome, we may be more inclined to stay in rural Ireland • This will relieve stress and effects of mental health. • Improved facilities for young people with special needs • Reduce underage drinking, smoking and drug use. 	Group 1 Group 2 Group 3 Group 4

Table 5(c): Prioritised Recommendation 3 **Education on Minorities**

Topic	Recommendation	Voted by
Education on Minorities	<p><i>What is the problem?</i></p> <p>There is a need for more education on minority communities e.g., LGBTI+, ethnic minorities, age. There is a gap in understanding between the generations.</p> <p><i>What needs to happen?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education on minorities on LGBT. Ethnic minorities, and age. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educate the educators on all minority issues ○ Sensitivity training for adults, older generation, teachers, guidance counsellors ○ Designated week in school. ○ Groups with young people and older generations to increase understanding and acceptance of each other • Break down the barriers between young people and older people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Groups with young people and older generations (intergenerational work) <p><i>What difference would this make?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a sense of community and belonging, reduce underage drinking, smoking and drug use. • Encourage people to stay in or return to rural communities • Increase acceptance and understanding (between generations) 	Group 3 Group 4

3.3.2 Activity 4 Future Proofing

In the final activity, the facilitators asked the participants about their plans for the future and whether they planned to stay in rural Ireland. Due to time constraints, not all young people answered these two questions. Table 6 provides examples of the responses given.

Table 6: Young people's views on their future in rural Ireland

Question 1: Do you see a future in rural Ireland?
<p>No, because I need better transport to go to work in a city.</p> <p>When I go to college, I will be moving away to a city but I would like to move back after about 10 years.</p> <p>The colleges I want to go to are far away.</p> <p>I'd love to, to raise kids here but it is not practical if there are no jobs. You can't expect people to stay here if there are no jobs.</p> <p>I don't want to raise a family here for them to be bored and hang around parks.</p> <p>My personal experience isn't bad in rural Ireland, but I don't see it as a future for myself for if I have kid. Just for being a tight knit community, it's so hard to fit in if you're different.</p>
Question 2: What Can be done?
<p>Internet connectivity, obviously we don't want to have to stay in the house and go online, but if we go online, we want it to work without lagging or cutting out.</p> <p>More jobs, but not just open a factory. Most young people are educated, they need to make jobs that people will want to work in. We need jobs in the area, not linking into a company (through a hub).</p> <p>My biggest thing is the transport generally. It's so hard to get around. That's the biggest problem I have with living in rural Ireland.</p> <p>Stop drink drivers. On TV a car had a built-in breathalyser. I thought this was brilliant. It could save lives</p> <p>New electric cars nowhere to go so there will be no more drink driving. We will have better technology.</p> <p>Government should fund electric cars. We have to have these things.</p>

3.4 Recommendations to the Minister

3.4.1 Presentations of Recommendations to Minister

Volunteers from each group presented Minister Humphreys with up to two recommendations from Activity 4 (see Box 3)

Box 3 Summary of Recommendations to Minister

Group 1 Recommendations

1. Facilities

There are not enough facilities for young people in rural Ireland. We are currently hanging out outside shops etc. There are no groups for 16–18 year-olds. Where there are facilities in local towns, these are not welcoming, warm, or clean. We want:

- a. To feel welcome. If we are made to feel welcome, we may be more inclined to stay in rural Ireland
- b. More opportunities to stay in rural Ireland

2. Transport

Better transport/bus services for youth who attend after school study or extra circular activities, so they are not waiting around after for half hour - or waiting for parents to get off work or for the next bus.

Group 2: Recommendations

1. Transport

The Government needs to make sure that public transport is sustainable to ensure that people will arrive on time for their school, college, or work. The Government needs to ensure that service providers are more aware of the need for suitable timetables for the majority of people in rural Ireland.

2. Facilities

Young people have nowhere to go, and often get in trouble because there is nothing to do. The government needs to invest in the spaces and places that young people occupy in rural Ireland. There should be more funding for things like youth café's and youth services to give young people something to do. There should be more designated areas for teenagers.

Group 3: Recommendations

1. Facilities

We need more facilities for teenagers. We need more facilities in general e.g., healthcare, roads etc.

2. Education on minorities.

- a. Education on minorities on LGBT, ethnic minorities and age.
- b. More education for teachers to ensure society is more inclusive and will help young people.

Group 4: Recommendations

1. Education on minorities.

There is a gap in understanding between the generations. We recommend having groups with young people and older generations to increase understanding and acceptance of each other.

2. Transport.

We recommend:

- a. Improved public transport and roads in rural Ireland.

3.4.2 Response from Minister Humphries

Minister Humphries thanked the young people for their input and for their recommendations. She emphasised that her role as Minister is to make rural communities better places to live in, to work in, and to grow up in. She knows from her personal experience what it is like to live in a rural area, but she is keen to hear the young people's perspectives and experiences. She emphasised that when the Government was developing the *Our Rural Future* 5-year plan, they met with groups of young people, and one of their recommendations was to host the Rural Youth Assembly.

The Minister then talked about Covid 19, its impact on rural communities and how difficult it was for young people. She noted that this period of time also threw up the opportunity to improve remote working, to allow people to apply to work from home and to have a better quality of life. Initiatives such as the *Connected Hubs*⁴ provided stand-alone units to facilitate people to work locally. Later in her response, the Minister also referred to the contract to improve broadband in rural Ireland and suggested that the young people talk to local broadband providers/broadband connection points to see if they can help.

She reflected on the young people's call for more facilities and improved transport. She referenced the services provided by Youth Work Ireland. She noted the idea of multi-purpose services, working during the day, after-schools, and weekends. She said this is something she would like to see more of and will take these recommendations on board.

Regarding the recommendation to improve transport, the Minister described how improvements to the local link service between Cavan and Monaghan provided five daily buses, improving accessibility to the Cavan Institute of Technology. Minister Humphries acknowledged that many young people in rural areas depend on parents to bring them to activities.

In terms of improved pavements/cycle routes, the Government has invested in the *Greenways Programme* and the Minister would like to see more of this. Covid 19 restrictions has taught us to improve access to our natural environment.

As regards the recommendation to improve roads in rural Ireland, the Minister reiterated the need to invest in Rural Ireland. *'We need to rural proof Government decisions.'*

In terms of investment in the Gaeltacht areas, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media is leading on the *Irish Language Strategy*. Minister Humphries said she will raise this with Minister Jack Chambers. Later in the discussion the Minister also described how it is difficult to get teachers who are qualified in Irish to teach in the Gaeltacht. She acknowledged that there are some challenges in this regard, but the Government are striving to make it better.

At the end of the session, the Minister asked if anyone had any questions. One participant asked how the young people can trust her to bring about change for rural areas. In response to the Minister's question on what she would like changed, this young person would like to see greater investment in the 'real life' in the Gaeltacht areas, rather than a corporate approach.

3.4.3 Close of Event

At the end of the session, Minister Humphreys thanked the young people for the opportunity to hear the young people's suggestions and to answer their questions. She repeated that young people are the voice of the next generation, and the people who will make the difference by looking at solutions as well as the problems.

⁴ Connected Hubs <https://connectedhubs.ie/>

“Today’s event was the first of its kind and provided a unique opportunity for young people right across the country to have their say on issues affecting Rural Ireland. It is important to hear directly from our young people as they are best placed to give their views on how to improve the quality of life for those growing up in our rural communities. I am delighted to have been able to engage directly with the participants on how we can revitalise Rural Ireland and make our communities better places to live, work, grow up in and raise a family. It also gave me an opportunity to tell them about ‘Our Rural Future’, which is already having a really positive impact in our rural towns and villages. I congratulate the young people who I met today and encourage them to continue to be active voices in their rural communities. They are the people who will make the difference.”

Andrew Forde from the Department for Rural and Community Development closed the session. He thanked all the participants and reassured them that this is not a tokenistic engagement. He noted that one of the participants mentioned the importance of intergenerational approach which is very important. He commented that the input from the groups was very rich, and the Department will reflect on all the recommendations when they develop their work plan. He emphasised that the process is very much a ‘living’ activity, and the Department expects that this will be an annual event to keep listening to young people, this is for the present but also the future.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Membership of Project Group

Name	Organisation	Role on day
Andrew Forde	DRCD	
Renagh Hayden	National Participation Office	Facilitator
Suzanne Byrne	National Participation Office	Facilitator
Mark O Dwyer	National Participation Office	Facilitator
Stephanie Cook	National Participation Office	Facilitator
Gavin Byrne	Foróige	Facilitator
Deirdre Fullerton	Insights Health and Social Research	Report writer/Note taker
Maria Herron	Independent Consultant	Note taker
Sheena McGrellis	Independent Consultant	Note taker
Maisie Cooper	Independent Consultant	Note taker

Appendix 2: Youth based organisations represented at the Assembly

The assembly participants were drawn from the following organisations:

- Ardee Hub
- Comhairle na nÓg (Cork County, Galway, Kildare, Kilkenny, Leitrim, Limerick, Longford, Mayo, Roscommon)
- Fis na hÓige Theatre Group
- Foróige
- Girl Guides (Blarney, Boherbue)
- Junior Chamber
- National Youth Council Ireland
- SpunOut
- YMCA Cork
- Youth Services (CDYS, KDYS, Limerick)
- Youth Work Ireland (National Youth Action Group)

Appendix 3 – Summary of young people’s views on rural life

Table 3a: Summary of young people’s views on the good things about life in rural Ireland by Group

Broad theme	Sub-theme	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Sense of Community Freedom and safety	The people/ Community	Nice people You can rely on people Family and friends are close	Nice friendly people You get to know everybody very well	Community spirit	Tightly knit communities
	Social aspect of farming		The social aspect of farming is really strong		
	Safety	Safe Nice area Quiet	It is quiet Lots of freedom	Kids are usually very safe	There is a lot of space and freedom
	Language			Irish language as first language	
Benefits of Nature		Good air quality	Beautiful place to live Nature walks	The ruralness Scenery	Good fresh air and exercise places Good place and peaceful access to own water
	Less pollution	No visual Pollution Less noise pollution Less traffic		No big buildings	Clean, fresh air;
Better education	Smaller schools		Smaller schools better education		

Table 3(b): What could be better about life in rural Ireland? (Themes by breakout room)

Question	Youth Advisory Groups	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
What could be better about life in rural Ireland?	Lack of wi-fi Lack of transport Improve Roads	Transport and infrastructure	(Poor) Connectivity	Transport, Broadband Jobs	(Better) Infrastructure - public transport
	Lack of facilities Awareness raising of the need for funding and lack of facilities in rural area	(Need for) Facilities for teenagers	(Need for) Entertainment	Health care and education	(Less) Isolation; more activities other than GAA/Sports
	Not being included Unheard	(Need for) Tourist Attractions	(Need for) Education and Jobs	Care for environment	Economic development
		(Need for) opportunities to experience other cultures		Support for elderly and isolated Irish language	

Appendix 4: Screenshot of recommendations from Group 1

sbymed4 + 6 · 1mo

Room one: What should the Government's key priorities be for young people in rural Ireland?

Keep your recommendations SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound.






Facilities for young people

- make a place away from people for young people to hang out (1)
- Promote facilities that are available through schools and social media (1)
- Community centres: Opening up the ones already in place to the public more and keeping the facilities clean and well cared for (2)
- clean the community centre (1)
- maintain the community centre (0)
- Indoor areas for young people to hang out (0)
- Youth groups for 16-18 year olds only (0)
- Event tailored to specific needs and age groups (0)
- Make places to make teenagers feel welcome (1)

Transport

- Transport! More routes connecting towns and villages (1)
- Better transport/bus services for youth who attend after school study or extra circulars so they aren't waiting around after for half hour - hour waiting for parents to get off work or for the next bus (0)
- Better the public transports to and from the community centres/wifi hubs to make them easier to access (0)
- Cycle paths from towns to villages (0)
- Promote the bike to work scheme (0)

Appendix 5: Participants' evaluation of Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence
(completed by 25 young people)

	Detail	1	2	3	4	5
						
Space	<i>I felt comfortable giving my opinions</i>	12.00% 3		12.00% 3	20.00% 5	56.00% 14
Voice	<i>I got the chance to give my opinions</i>	8.00% 2	8.00% 2	4.00% 1	24.00% 6	56.00% 14
Audience	<i>I know who wants to hear our opinions</i>	4.00% 1	8.00% 2	12.00% 3	20.00% 5	56.00% 14
Influence	<i>I think what we said today will be taken seriously</i>	12.00% 3	12.00% 3	20.00% 5	16.00% 4	40.00% 10

Open Comments	
The best thing about today was:	<p>Everyone had a thing to say, and they were listened to.</p> <p>Talking about our views</p> <p>Coming up with our own ideas</p> <p>Interesting and informative (x3)</p> <p><i>It was very informative and interesting while also being fun and very comfortable and easy to engage with</i></p> <p>The discussions x debates (x2)</p> <p>The ministers talk & talking to Minister</p> <p>Talking to the minister and making sure she heard what we had to say</p> <p>The break out rooms (x2)</p> <p>Being able to voice my opinion (x4)</p> <p><i>Being able to voice my concerns and feel like they were taken into account</i></p> <p>Hearing others' view and experiences (x11)</p> <p><i>meeting people my age who have great opinions about how to improve rural Ireland</i></p> <p><i>Seeing people from different counties and the experiences they've had and how similar they were to mine</i></p> <p><i>Getting to give opinions on something that we can see tangible significant change. Being taken seriously by facilitators.</i></p>
One thing you'd change from today's event	<p>More time with Minister (x2)</p> <p><i>Have more time to see what the minister had to say</i></p> <p><i>I would change the amount of time we had with the Minister</i></p>

	<p>More time <i>Taking turns kind of to answer questions or asking certain people for answers (this was done a good bit but some people still didn't get the chance due to everyone wanting to talk and share their experience</i></p> <p><i>Would possible to have more time given to each category as some felt rushed at time. Possibly trying to do too much in too little time.</i></p> <p>Not taken seriously by minister (x2) <i>I felt the minister didn't take us seriously and that really, she was just ticking the box rather than actually wanting to make a change. Which considering the amount of work that went into presenting her with these issues was quite disappointing. Especially when it came to her dismissing broadband issues which ironically multiple people had difficulty with as she was talking to us. Disappointingly in line with my expectations.</i></p> <p><i>It seemed to me that Minister Humphreys was not serious in her desire to hear the opinions of young people, she shot down a lot of our opinions about how to improve, such as broadband, by saying we should try harder to find another broadband service, when I think there should be more effort on the Government's part to improve infrastructure.</i></p> <p>Have it in person rather than online (x2) <i>I would have loved to be able to speak and voice my opinion in person rather than online.</i></p> <p>Topics in advance <i>I would have sent out a couple of possible topics a week before hand so people would have a chance to think about what they want to say and what they feel needs to be addressed</i></p> <p>Shorter or have longer breaks (x 3) <i>Provide 2 long rest breaks of equal times (15-20 minutes) for a meeting / consultation lasting 3-4 hours. Otherwise, It was great.</i></p> <p>Nothing (x5) <i>Nothing, it was very effective at allowing people of all types of backgrounds to speak and was</i></p>
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