



2022

Report of the National Rural Youth Assembly

National Youth Assembly of Ireland



An Roinn Leanai, Comhionannais,
Michumais, Línpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



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Acronyms used in this Report

CNN: Comhairle na nÓg

CSPE: Civic, Social and Political Education

CTCS: Community Training Centres

DRCD: Department of Rural and Community Development

ETBs: Education and Training Boards

HEAR: Higher Education Access Route

HSE: Health Service Executive

NPO: National Participation Office

PRSTV: Proportional Representation Single Transferable Vote

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

SPHE: Social, Personal and Health Education

SUSI: Student Universal Support Ireland

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Executive summary

The second National Rural Youth Assembly took place on the 14th of July 2022, hosted by the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), facilitated by the National Participation Office (NPO). The Assembly consisted of 38 young people, aged 12-24 years, from across Ireland who gathered at the National Museum of Ireland at Collins Barracks in Dublin 7. The young delegates made seven recommendations to the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys T.D., for consideration in the 2022 Work Programme of in [Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025](#).

Recommendations

NATIONAL RURAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY 2022 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Programme for Government committed to the establishment of a Youth Assembly, with various modules, for rural young people. In addition, the Department of Rural and Community Development made a commitment in Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 to establish a Rural Youth Assembly to allow young people living in rural Ireland to make an ongoing contribution to issues that impact on them and their future.

The National Rural Youth Assembly took place on the 14th July 2022. 38 youth delegates aged 12-24 years from across Ireland attended, representing youth organisations and Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Councils). The delegates attended a preparation session and then took part in a day of discussion. They had seven key messages for the Department of Rural and Community Development to consider. These are outlined below.

- INVESTMENT**
Government funding for investment in public transport links between rural towns and local communities within one year to make travel more accessible to young people.
- HEALTHCARE**
Youth participation on local HSE boards to ensure their voices are heard on healthcare issues.
- YOUTH VOICES IN COMMUNITIES**
The appointment of a Community Liaison Person to facilitate contact between youth in the community and the action/ Government bodies.
- TRANSPORT**
More opportunities for young people to engage with officials, T.D.s and Ministers on topics such as public transport. Reduce the age for a tractor licence to 15.
- VOTING AGE**
Introduce voting age for 18 year olds in local elections. Publish information on voting systems and how to vote in accessible language. Begin a process for a referendum allowing 16 year olds to vote in all elections (full representation). Young people also need a say on how the leaving certificate is structured, processed and delivery of 3rd level options.
- HOUSING CRISIS**
Calling on the Government of Ireland to provide 100% redress for all houses affected by Pyrite/ Mica before it is dangerous to live in these homes.
- CLIMATE JUSTICE**
By 2040, we expect the Government to support established farms to achieve a just transition with provision of financial aid for the gradual elimination of unsustainable practices.

Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland

Ár dTodhchaí Tuaithe Our Rural Future

Key Issues

Delegates discussed the key issues facing young people in rural Ireland. They identified 13 issues and developed a set of recommendations, then in groups they nominated their top seven recommendations for the Minister for Rural and Community Development. The full set of issues and potential solutions are set out in the table below.

	Issue	Situation	Action	Recommendation
1.	Investment	Lack of investment in public transport and transport links preventing young people from travelling.	Government funding of public transport links connecting rural towns with each other and connecting smaller communities.	Government funding for investment in public transport links between rural towns and local communities within one year to make travel more accessible to young people.
2.	Youth Organisations	Not enough awareness and education supporting young people to take action, make submissions and have their voices heard.	Government investment in promoting and raising awareness of youth organisations to increase youth involvement in issues.	Government investment in promoting and raising awareness of youth organisations to increase youth participation and voice.
3.	Healthcare: Youth Voice	Youth voices not being heard on health care issues.	Better opportunities for youth voices to be heard.	Youth participation on local HSE boards to ensure their voices are heard on healthcare issues.
4.	Healthcare Services	Overworked junior doctors leads to migration of doctors.	Increase salaries and reduce working hours for junior doctors and nurses.	Increasing pay and reduction hours of work for junior doctors and nurses will provide them with an incentive not to leave Ireland and work in another country. It will also provide more healthcare services in rural areas.

5.	Youth Voices in the Community	Lack Of opportunities in the community to incorporate people's interests and opinions from the diverse spectrum of people living there.	Talking to County Councils, Community Councils and Village Committees about communicating with their young people.	Community Liaison Person who would facilitate contact between the youth in the community and the action/ Government bodies.
6.	Education: Youth Voice	Not all people know about the ways to have their say, like the Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils).	More awareness around Youth Groups, Foróige, Comhairle na nÓg and other programmes that listen to youth.	Comhairle na nÓg education is introduced to schools through CSPE or other subjects.
7.	Consultation: Youth Voice	Adults need to listen to young people and act on their opinions on transport issues.	More consultations with young people. Bring legal employment age down to 12 years.	More opportunities to engage with officials, T.D.s and Ministers.
8.	Improved Transport	Lack of understanding from T.D.s and Ministers about rural areas and public transport.	Trial a bus service to bring people to work.	More consultation opportunities with T.D.'s and Ministers about public transportation issues. Tractor license should be brought down to age 15 years.
9.	Voting age at 16 years	The biggest challenge facing young people in rural Ireland is that they can't vote at age 16	A short-term solution is to allow young people to vote in local elections. There should also be an education/awareness programme around voting systems.	Introduce voting for 16 year olds in local elections. Publish (in accessible language) information about voting systems and how to vote. Begin a referendum to allow 16 year olds to vote in all elections (full representation). Young people need a say in how the Leaving Certificate is structured, processed and delivery of 3rd level options.

10.	Lack of Housing	Lack of available housing, housing crises.	100% redress for those affected by Mica. More houses, rent controls/tenant protection.	Cheaper student accommodation / designated student accommodation.
11.	Housing Crisis (incl. Pyrite/Mica redress)	A high proportion of houses in Donegal and counties along the West Coast have been affected by Pyrite/Mica building blocks which is destroying their homes.	100% redress for all affected homes.	Calling on Government of Ireland to provide 100% redress for all houses affected by Pyrite/Mica before it is too dangerous to live in these homes.
12.	Housing	Mass building of houses by hedge fund companies and second home (wealthy property owners). Shortage of housing.	We want more rent caps throughout the country in accordance with property type. Increase the vacant property grants to fix-up abandoned properties.	We want affordable rent for low-income families/young adults within the next five years.
13.	Climate Justice	Financial struggles around sustainability for farmers.	Development of accessible educational resource packs around methods of sustainable farming. Encourage Irish people to buy local to support Irish farmers. State supported/controlled grants for equipment/training.	By 2040, we expect the Government to support established farms to achieve a just transition with provision of financial aid for the gradual elimination of unsustainable practices.

Preparation Session

The young delegates were provided with information ahead of the Assembly through a Preparation Session where they heard from experts and young people who spoke about the key issues for rural development policy. At the Preparation Session, delegates discussed these issues and posed questions for DRCD to answer ahead of the assembly. This provided the young delegates with the necessary information in order to form their views.

The National Rural Youth Assembly Discussions

The Assembly itself discussed issues of concern to young people in rural areas, supports that may help young people to live and work in rural Ireland and how young people can become future leaders of their communities. Key issues arose from these discussions and solutions were proposed to inform the development of the assembly's recommendations.

SECTION 1: Introduction and Background to the National Youth Assembly

1.1 Introduction

Including the voice of children and young people in decisions that affect them is a key priority in accordance with Government commitments under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The establishment of Youth Assemblies on a range of topics is a key commitment in the Programme for Government 2020. DCEDIY has established the National Youth Assembly of Ireland to meet this commitment and collaborates closely with other Government Departments on convening Youth Assemblies on specific topics.

The National Youth Assembly of Ireland is made up of 30 sitting delegates between the ages of 12 and 25 years who have been nominated by Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils)¹, youth organisations and relevant organisations. Guest delegates are nominated by relevant organisations to represent special interest groups on specific policy areas addressed by the Assembly and to have a voice on the services, policies and issues, which directly affect them in their local area. The National Youth Assembly of Ireland provides young people with the opportunity to have their say on issues that are important to them, some of whom are below the age of 18 and therefore have no other voting mechanism to have their voice heard.

The messages and recommendations made by a National Youth Assembly may feed into citizen assemblies and other broader citizen consultations. Recommendations are intended to inform Government policy on areas such as climate, digitalisation, and rural development. Additionally, the National Youth Assembly of Ireland may consider other issues of importance to young people and their future.

The Programme for Government committed to the establishment of a Youth Assembly, with various modules, for rural young people. In addition, the Department of Rural and Community Development made a commitment in *Our Rural Future* to establish a Rural Youth Assembly to allow young people living in rural Ireland to make an on-going contribution to issues that impact on them and their future. This report provides details of the second National Rural Youth Assembly.

¹ Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils in each of the 31 local authorities in Ireland.

1.2 The National Rural Youth Assembly

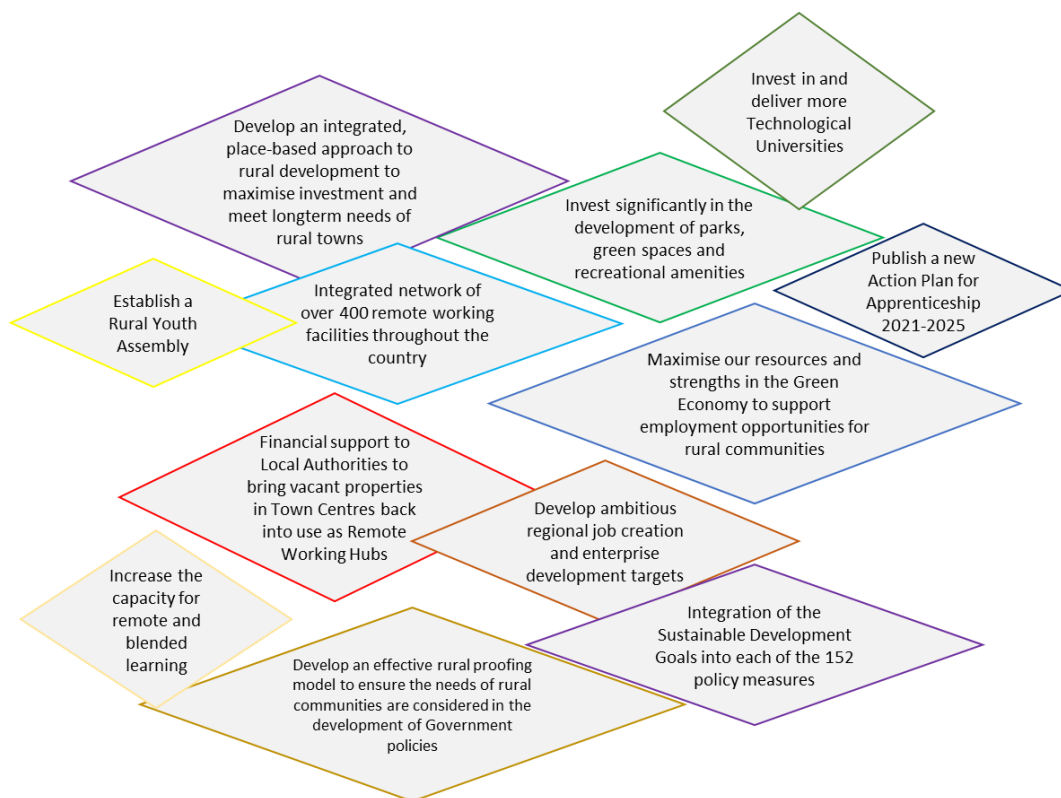
The first National Rural Youth Assembly (NRYA) took place in November 2021, with 38 young people aged 12 to 17 years, from Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils), as a precursor to the formal establishment of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland. The establishment of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland in early 2022 expanded the age range to 24 years and invited a wide range of youth organisations, as well as Comhairle na nÓg, to nominate delegates. This brought the NRYA under the umbrella of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland and facilitated the inclusion of guest delegates to provide a voice for youth specifically on rural issues.

The second NRYA was held to capture the ongoing contribution of young people in the development and implementation of rural policy by allowing *Our Rural Future* to be a living policy, with the potential for new actions arising from recommendations of the Assembly to be added to the annual work programme. (See p.95 *Our Rural Future* for example). The NRYA is made up of young people reflecting the geographic and cultural diversity of rural areas. It takes place annually² and this year, 2022, took the form of a full-day in-person event. The Assembly was centred on age-appropriate and accessible means of discussing and understanding the issues of most importance to young people in rural Ireland. The scope of the assembly involved:

- Discussion on issues of concern to young people in rural areas.
- What supports are needed to enable young people to live and work in rural Ireland.
- Ways in which young people can be supported to become future leaders of their communities.

The views of young delegates are considered by officials at the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). The DRCD commitment under Action 73 of *Our Rural Future* is “to allow young people living in rural Ireland to make an ongoing contribution to identifying and influencing ongoing contribution to identifying and influencing policy issues that impact on them and their future”. *Our Rural Future* is committed to a more sustainable society and ensuring rural areas and regions are supported by Government policy to be strong, resilient and vibrant communities through effective delivery of required resources, services and infrastructure. *Our Rural Future* commitments include:

² The first National Rural Youth Assembly took place online (due to Covid19 pandemic restrictions) on 16 November 2021.



1.3 The Second National Rural Youth Assembly

The second NRYA took place on the 14th of July 2022, hosted by the DCEDIY and the DRCD, facilitated by the National Participation Office (NPO)³. The Assembly consisted of 38 young people, aged 12-24 years, from across Ireland. The event took place between 10.30am and 3.15pm at the National Museum of Ireland at Collins Barracks, Benburb Street, Stoneybatter, Dublin 7 (see Appendix 1 for NRYA Running Order and Methodology).

The steps involved in convening the NRYA are:

- ✚ Development of a Project Charter to define policy area and scope of the NRYA and confirm how young people’s views will be used outlining commitment and responsibility for ensuring same.
- ✚ Establishment of a Youth Advisory Group to assist in planning the NRYA sitting.
- ✚ Hold a Preparatory Session to ensure young people are provided with sufficient information in order to develop and express their views.
- ✚ Convene the NRYA.

³ The National Participation Office (NPO) was established in 2021 within DCEDIY to manage and coordinate the activities of Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg, the National Youth Assembly of Ireland and other related youth participation initiatives and structures.

- ✚ Perform an evaluation process (see Appendix 6 for participant responses in the evaluation process).
- ✚ Provide a written report on the NRYA proceedings.
- ✚ Review of report by young people to ensure it accurately reflects their views.
- ✚ Feedback to young people from decision-makers at the next NRYA on how the 2022 NRYA recommendations have been actioned.

The NRYA Project Charter outlined a range of themes upon which the views of young people would be sought. These fell into two categories:

A) Living in Rural Ireland:

- Have you had to leave rural Ireland?
- What were the reasons?
- What would have kept you in rural Ireland or changed that decision?
- Do you wish or plan to go back to live in rural Ireland in the future?
- What are the most important considerations for making the decision to leave and/or decision to return to rural Ireland

B) Leaders of the Future:

- Are young voices being heard?
- How can they be better heard?
- What supports are needed to encourage young voices?
- What forums would better capture young voices?

The range of issues and concerns of importance for the NRYA are linked to a number of Sustainable Development Goals, namely:

- Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages (Goal 3).
- Ensure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4).
- Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5).
- Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8).
- Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation (Goal 9).
- Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11).

1.4 The Preparation Session for the Second National Rural Youth Assembly

The NPO, in collaboration with DCEDIY and DRCD, hosted an online Preparation Session on 29 June 2022 between 10:15am and 1pm (see Appendix 2 for NYA Time Table for Preparation Session). This session consisted of 36 young people aged between 12 and 24 years⁴ from a number of Comhairlí and youth organisations (see section 2.1 below for full list).

The aim of the Preparation Session was to help prepare delegates for the Assembly. At the Preparation Session, delegates heard from guest speakers, Peter⁵, Rural Youth, East Galway; Dr Karen Keaveney, Head of Subject for Rural Development and Assistant Professor, School of Agriculture and Food Science, University College Dublin, and Rachel Foody, Sligo, Rural Young Adult. Delegates discussed the issues raised by guest speakers and how these relate to their experiences, with a final session providing delegates with an opportunity to forward questions to the Minister and the DRCD.

⁴ The gender breakdown consisted of 12 males, 12 females, 2 Prefer Not to Say, 1 Other and 9 Don't know.

⁵ In respect of the principles of GDPR, the surname of this guest speaker is not provided as he was under 18 years of age.

SECTION 2: The Structure and Format of the National Rural Youth Assembly

2.1 Structure of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland

The National Youth Assembly of Ireland is made up of 30 sitting delegates for a term of 18 months. Delegates are nominated by Comhairle na nÓg, established youth organisations and youth participation initiatives.

Guest delegates are also nominated for Assemblies on specific policy areas and these are nominated by organisations that have a particular interest in the issue being addressed by the Assembly and from organisations relevant to seldom-heard children and young people.

The National Youth Assembly of Ireland convenes at least twice a year, once as the National Youth Assembly on Climate and once as the Rural Youth Assembly and may convene at other times on related issues or on other issues as required. This also involves preparation workshops, Youth Advisory Groups and other lead-in events.

Roles, Responsibilities and Policy Leads

DCEDIY's NPO is the vehicle through which the National Youth Assembly of Ireland convenes. Further activities that support the National Youth Assembly of Ireland include:

- The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making
- The Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan
- Hub na nÓg as a national centre of excellence and coordination on giving children and young people a voice in decision-making
- National Implementation Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making

The DRCD is the policy lead on all matters brought before the NRYA that relate to the *Our Rural Future*. DCEDIY leads on consultations with the NRYA on rural matters, including working with DRCD to define questions, governance structures and methodologies.

Approach

The DCEDIY supports other Government Departments and State Agencies or Bodies in giving children and young people a voice, and real influence, in strategic developments such as policies, programmes, services, legislation and research. The Department's approach is that of "participation with purpose", as outlined in the *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*.

When children and young people are involved in decision-making, their views must be listened to, taken seriously and given due weight, with the intention that these views will influence the outcome

or initiate change. This report reflects the DCEDIY's Participation Framework⁶, the purpose of which is to provide a space and voice for children and young people in decision-making to ensure their views are listened to, taken seriously and given due weight, with the intention that these views will influence decisions or initiate change. The DRCD values the voice and views of young people and has committed to providing feedback on how the recommendations arising from the NRYA were used.

In accordance with the Participation Framework⁷, the NRYA provides a safe, inclusive opportunity for young people to form and express their views. In addition, their right to have their views given due weight is facilitated by the presence of key decision-makers who listen to their recommendations and commit to acting upon them as appropriate. Feedback to the Assembly will be provided by DRCD at the next sitting of the NRYA on how the previous year's NRYA recommendations were acted upon, with a clear indication of when actions were or will be implemented by the DRCD and the key DRCD decision-makers responsible for implementing the actions. The NRYA includes the voices of young people in policymaking for rural areas on an ongoing basis, by making recommendations to the Minister for Rural and Community Development to consider for inclusion in the annual work programme of *Our Rural Future*.

The DRCD will present the NYRA recommendations to the interdepartmental working group for the work programme planning and review process for *Our Rural Future* and discuss how these recommendations may be implemented as specific actions to be included in the current or future annual work programme.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

Our Rural Future is an ambitious and transformational policy for rural development in Ireland which focuses on sustainability and optimising opportunities for individuals, communities, and business. The policy framework sets out a vision for rural Ireland containing over 150 measures for delivery over the lifetime of the policy, for both short-term recovery and longer-term development.

Implementation of the policy is co-ordinated on behalf of the Government by the DRCD. Progress on its implementation is overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Investment which is chaired by the Taoiseach. The Cabinet Committee is supported by a Senior Officials Group of civil servants from key Government Departments. Progress updates are published every six

⁶ The Participation Framework (National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making) is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (the National Participation Strategy) and was developed in collaboration with Professor Laura Lundy of Queen's University, Belfast.

⁷ For further details see https://hubnanog.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/5587-Child-Participation-Framework_report_LR_FINAL_Rev.pdf

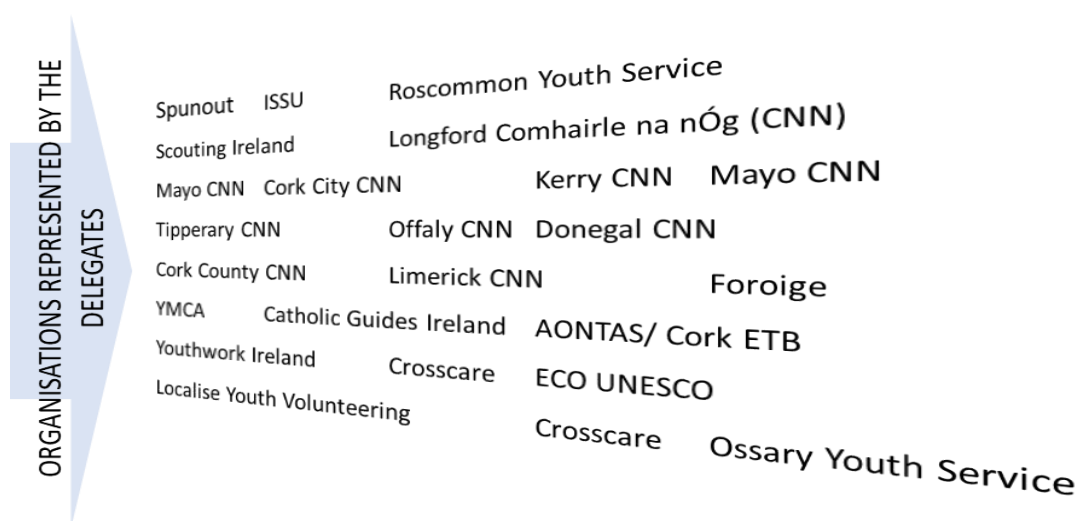
months. The end-year progress reports include a work programme for the following year, enabling new actions to be added over the lifetime of the policy. Mid-term reviews are built into the implementation review process.

The Government is committed to a continuous dialogue with people in rural Ireland throughout the life of this policy. In this context, structures are built into the policy to support ongoing dialogue with rural stakeholders, including through the NRYA, to enable new actions to be added through an annual work programme which responds to emerging needs and issues. The recommendations of the NRYA will be considered for inclusion in the annual work programme.

The NRYA builds the leadership capacity of young people within rural communities to facilitate their contribution, through 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. The NRYA acts as a vehicle for dialogue between young people and children and Government Departments. It provides insight into some of the concerns facing young people in rural Ireland and assists in the identification of potential ameliorative actions.

2.2 Who were the young people involved?

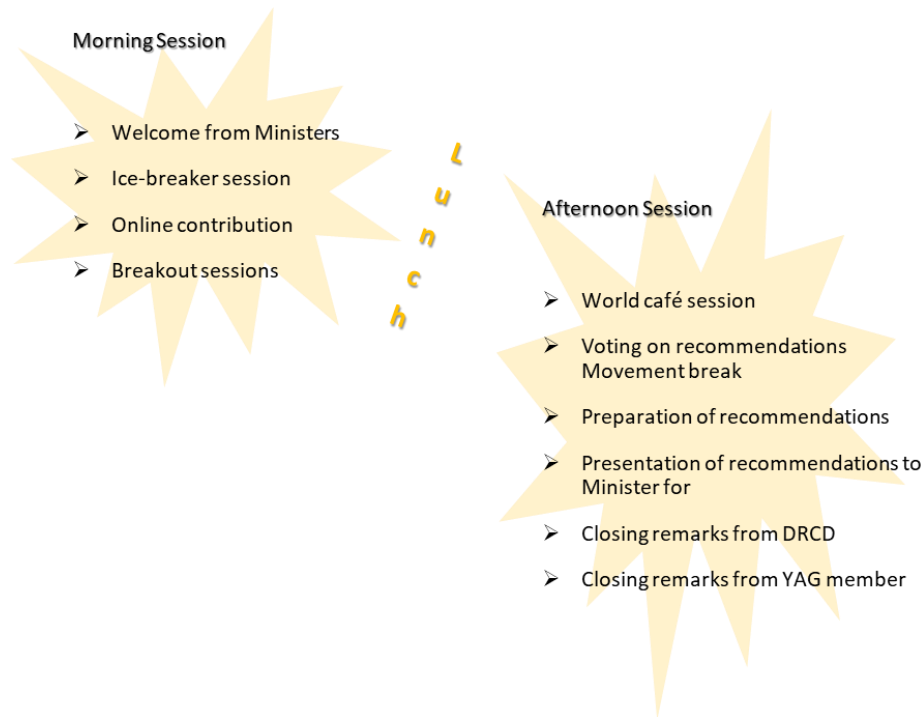
The NRYA, 2022, involved 38 young people ranging from 12 to 24 years old. This included 14 young people aged between 12 - 15 years, nine aged between 16 - 17 and fifteen participants aged between 18 - 24 years old. The gender breakdown consisted of 12 males, 19 females, two other, two prefer not to say and three don't know. The delegates from the following Comhairlí and youth organisations participated in the NRYA:



* CNN – Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Council)

2.3 The format of the National Rural Youth Assembly

The NRYA involved a morning session from 10:30am to 12:30pm and an afternoon session from 1:15pm to 3:15pm. The full day NRYA followed the below schedule (see Appendix 1 for the NRYA Running Order and Methodology):



2.4 Methodological Activities Utilised in National Rural Youth Assembly

Before the formal activities began, the facilitators in each of the breakout rooms introduced the adults in the room and asked for the delegates to introduce themselves. Facilitators then led icebreaker activities to place the delegates at ease, give the young people the opportunity to get to know each other and to 'warm up' for the session interactions throughout the day. The next warm up activity was to ask the delegates to answer 'What does rural Ireland mean to you?' and to record these answers on Mentimeter which could be displayed as a Word Cloud on a screen in the main room. However, due to internet connectivity issues in the location of the consultations, this exercise was not possible to complete.

The core methodologies used in the NRYA were breakout sessions, world café sessions and voting on recommendations sessions for seeking the views of young people in each of the seven groups. The delegates were divided into groups based on their ages. The breakdown of Group Tables for each of these sessions was:

Group Table 1: Five delegates aged between 12-16 years.

Group Table 2: Five delegates aged between 12-17 years.

Group Table 3: Six delegates aged between 12-16 years.

Group Table 4: Five delegates aged between 12-14 years.

Group Table 5: Five delegates aged between 18-22 years.

Group Table 6: Seven delegates aged between 17-24 years.

Group Table 7: Five delegates aged between 18-24 years.

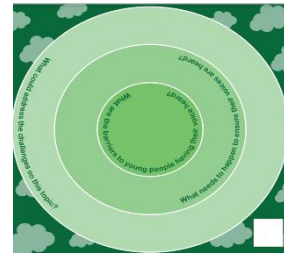
The **Breakout Session** (Activity 1) was facilitated to allow delegates to voice what issues they believe to be most important to young people living in rural Ireland, what are the biggest challenges and whether they felt young people's voices are being heard on these issues.

The **Breakout Session Placemat** (see Appendix 3) used for recording the views of these young people in each of the seven groups.



The **World Café Session** (Activity 2) involved bringing the individual groups back to their Group Tables to discuss within their group the priority areas they identified in their breakout session. They were asked to consider three questions relating to what needs to happen to address the challenges, what are the barriers for young people's voices being heard on these issues and what needs to happen to ensure their voices are heard and thus lead to improvement on these issues. Finally they were asked to discuss their recommendations to the DRCD, for actions to improve these issues, by deciding the top two ideas that their Table want to move forward to recommendations (situation, action, recommendation). Each delegate was given three votes per person, all of which they could use for their favourite option or spread their votes out.

World Café Placemat (see Appendix 4) used for recording the views of these young people in each of the seven groups.



Recommendations Sheet (see Appendix 5) for recording each Group Table's top two recommendations.



In the **Recommendations session** (Activity 3) each Group Table in the seven groups was asked to work through their final recommendation and assign a volunteer to feedback one of their recommendations to the DRCD at the end of the day.

2.5 Data Recording

To ensure the views of the delegates were accurately recorded and presented, an independent report writer was commissioned to prepare a report outlining the young people's views and recommendations. The discussions in each of the three Activities were recorded on Placemats and Sheets and by note takers.

SECTION 3: Preparation Session - Content and Key Findings

As mentioned in section 1.4 above, 36 young people attended the online Preparation Session between the ages of 12 and 24 years old which was convened by officials in the DCEDIY and DRCD. The session provided networking opportunities for delegates and a chance to get to know each other, there was also a presentation from the 2021 NRYA and the DRCD provided an update on the status of the 2021 NYA recommendations. In order to prepare delegates for the NRYA, key note speakers provided some background around the key features and issues relating to rural Ireland and those specifically related to rural youth. This was followed by a Q&A session with key note speakers, after which the delegates discussed these issues and posed some questions for Minister Humphreys and DRCD.

3.1 Key Note Speaker Presentations

The first speaker, Peter, talked about the key features of being a young person living in the rural community in Ballymacward, East Galway. He spoke about agriculture being the dominant industry and a 23% reliance on turf cutting. There are many small schools in Ballymacward and GAA and Foróige are the main social outlets for young people. The village is closely linked to three towns for shops and services– Tuam, Ballinasloe and Athenry – and there is a dependence on the use of a car to access services in these towns. He identified the travel times required to access services such as the closest largest supermarket being an average 20 minute drive from the town, the cinema being a 45 minute drive, and NUI Galway being a 50 minute drive. Finally, he noted some changes happening in Ballymacward, such as the creation of Connected Hubs (to access good broadband), small enterprises and initiatives (music, sport, entertainment, businesses using pre-existing locations) and the development of green spaces and biodiversity maintenance.

Dr Karen Keaveney (Head of Rural Development, UCD) spoke about policy considerations as they relate to rural Ireland, the six key factors affecting rural community development and future opportunities. She then outlined three considerations for the delegates at the session which were: *what is 'rural'? What type of 'rural' do you want? How does 'rural' change?*

Policy Considerations:

- No 'one' rural perspective.
- A weak urban structure across Ireland.
- Lack of diversity within rural economy.
- Emphasis on agriculture and food processing.
- Broadband is still an issue.
- Housing problems – access and affordability.
- The idea of conservatism – unwilling to change or adapt.
- Inequality and 'hidden' poverty.

- Climate change and climate justice.

Six key factors affecting community development in rural Ireland:

- Aging and migration.
- Urbanisation.
- Global shift in production.
- Rise of emerging economies.
- Climate and environmental changes.
- Technological breakthroughs.

Future opportunities:

- ✓ Develop needs to be place based – ‘endogenous’.
- ✓ Asset based.
- ✓ Collaborative – bottom up approach.

The final key note speaker was a young person, Rachel Foody, from Sligo and currently studying in Limerick. Rachel spoke about her desire to live in Enniscrone in Sligo after completing her studies. She spoke of the close rural community there, how she valued the ‘cohesion’ within the community and community activities and events such as GAA and the Enniscrone Show. She also shared some of the challenges about living in Enniscrone, that transport is an issue for accessing social facilities, poor broadband connectivity, lack of health services and that the isolation prevents some young people from staying or relocating back to the area. She also commented that emigration continues to be an option for students like herself. She said that she would like to see further investment for rural communities through existing organisations like the GAA and the initiation of a conversation about rural development through the education system (CSPE).

3.2 Discussion of Key Note Speaker Presentations

The discussion that followed key note speaker presentations focused on a number of key issues and were identified by the delegates within this discussion. Some of these were:

- ✚ A delegate from Dublin spoke about the close linkages between the urban and rural areas of Ireland. He recognised that by developing rural areas this alleviates problems in the urban centres e.g. housing, environment, traffic etc.
- ✚ Another member recognised how safety issues exist in rural areas for young people. In particular the dangers of farms, walking/cycling on roads with no cycle routes.
- ✚ A female member spoke about the different experience for girls growing up in rural Ireland compared to growing up in the cities. She commented sometimes girls in rural Ireland may be fearful of being out after dark – lack of lighting, safe spaces. She also suggested that there are fewer opportunities for girls in rural Ireland to exercise and lead a healthy lifestyle unless they play sport.

- ✚ A member from Donegal highlighted the Pyrite/Mica crisis in that county leading to poor unsafe accommodation and asked: *How is Ireland addressing this issue?* She stated that students are particularly affected.
- ✚ Another member believed it was important to decide what we want for rural areas. He posed two questions: *What do we lose if we develop villages and towns? Impacts on the environment, culture and heritage?*
- ✚ One member raised the query about whether the older and younger generations were on the 'same page' when it comes to deciding the future of rural Ireland, posing the question: *Do the older generation resist change?*
- ✚ There was discussion about a cardiac hospital closing which meant that the nearest cardiac service was one hour away which could be a case of life or death.
- ✚ Another issue discussed was the need for more non-religious schools (i.e. Educate Together), which currently account for only 5% of all schools in rural areas

Some issues specifically highlighted by the older cohort in the Preparation Session were:

- Transport difficulties to school and colleges.
- Ensuring a Just Transition.
- Action at local level and not just at national level.
- Policies to include minorities, not simply based on majority issues.
- Plain English within policy documents to encourage a conversation that everyone can engage in.
- Issues with rural broadband connectivity.
- More sport activities.
- The challenge (culture shock) of moving from small primary schools to much larger schools for children/young people.
- Lack of adequate transport, and associated costs, mean that young people need to rely on adults, such as family members, for transportation in cars.
- Expense of living away from home for college.
- Having to leave area for access to higher education or health services – insufficient accessibility to services and amenities locally.
- Do people in rural areas want more development? Do they want to see their area get busier and more built up?
- Local older people objecting to planning applications because they don't want development (battle between the younger and older generation). Local communities can be protective about how things are and don't want change.

3.3 Preparation Session Recommendations

The delegates in the Preparation Session commented on the huge learning experience of the day, how rewarding it was and how the session had given them 'lots of food for thought'. They spoke about how a lot is going in the right direction and that it was encouraging to hear about Connected Hubs becoming operational. They made a few recommendations in response to the key note speakers and after the day's discussions. These were:

- ✓ Fewer primary schools built on religious owned property where the priest has too much influence over decisions.
- ✓ More non-prescribed religion and the ability to study any religion in school.
- ✓ More action to be taken by Government (not just plans for action).
- ✓ National organisations must bring quality education to rural areas and address the issues in rural areas with regard to education.
- ✓ ETB's can potentially provide a diverse range of services, courses that you can do, e.g. youth reach, CTCS, adult literacy.
- ✓ The Government needs to provide more for rural areas and smaller towns and has the means and resources to do this

An official from the DRCD advised the delegates on developments currently underway to address some of the main recommendations raised in the Preparation Session.

3.4 Preparation Session Questions

Following the discussion and recommendations, delegates made a list of some questions they formulated as a result of information received in the Preparation Session. These are listed in the table below.

Cost of travel for 13-18 year olds. Can this be reduced? (There are travel cards for 18-23 year olds and student travel cards from ISSU but it's cheaper to travel as a child than use this travel card from the ISSU. Hard to ask parents for money to fund expensive transport).

Response: See update on Transport.

TFI was established recently enough in Ireland to tackle the issue of the lack of transport in rural areas, some local bus routes were established but it's still not enough to service all the people around Ireland. Have there been any decisions taken to improve or change this?

Response: See update on Transport.

Can we increase the amount of benches and dining out areas in all of Ireland? (It has recently come into Castlebar and has been amazing for teens and young adults).

Response: See update on Town Centre First Policy.

What is happening to allow youth involvement in Sustainable Action Projects connecting and involving youth in taking part in conserving their local rural environment and conserve their areas together as a community?

Response: See update on Town Centre First Policy.

When do you see transport systems changing? (One delegate said the problems she has heard in the last 3 years affecting youth in rural Ireland have mainly all been very similar).

Response: See update on Transport.

What type of transport system would they be looking to have in rural Ireland? Would it be similar to Dublin or would people need to book a seat in advance or a bus stop?

Response: See update on Transport

Is there a framework/support for local communities to develop their own areas?

Response: See update on Town Centre First Policy

Vicious circle - people forced to leave rural areas because of lack of facilities then contributing to over-crowding, housing crisis, congestion etc. in urban areas - how are these links being dealt with?

How does the minister address the conflict between rural people wanting things to remain the same and the need to develop for younger people, those who've left and want to return or new comers (e.g. planning objections to any new applications)?

How is your department working on the integration of those in direct provision and others seeking asylum with the surrounding community?

How are you planning to engage the rural population and represent them on a national policy level?

When can we expect to see the same level of public transport access in rural Ireland as in the Dublin area? Can we expect the same level of availability of buses in the Border Midlands West as in Dublin?

Response: See update on Transport

Broadband is a key factor in quality of life of residents, as well as attracting business to the west. When can we expect a standard of broadband in rural areas that matches Dublin?

How are the regions divided/looked at? Is all of the Border/Midlands/West together, is it county by county or is there individual parish-by-parish/small scale analysis?

How the DRCD was formed and was there a selection process for relevant individuals to be given primary roles within the department?

Actions speak louder than words. What actions have you put in place to address the issues raised at the 2021 Assembly? Have you put in place any KPIs to measure the success of these actions?

Response: **The report and recommendations of the inaugural Rural Event Assembly will be brought to the attention of the Minister for Rural and Community Development and a formal report will issue shortly to the Assembly responding to the recommendations.**

(See Appendix 7 for the Update on progress since the inaugural Rural Youth Assembly, in which the questions are answered)

SECTION 4: National Rural Youth Assembly Discussion and Key Findings

This section details the key issues of importance highlighted by the young delegates in the 2022 NRYA.

4.1 Identifying Key Issues and Priority Issues for Rural Ireland

In Activity 1, the Breakout Sessions, delegates were divided into their Table Groups and asked to answer and discuss three key questions. The younger cohort were initially asked what were the most important issues to young people living in rural Ireland, whilst the older delegates (young adults) were asked what would influence them to stay or leave rural Ireland. All the Group Tables were then asked what are the biggest challenges of living in rural Ireland and whether they felt young people's voices are being heard on these issues. The delegates were then asked to vote on their top priority areas from the key issues they identified. The outputs from Activity 1 are highlighted in the three boxes below.

Box 1: Key Issues highlighted by breakout session delegates in Activity 1, Question 1

Q1 (Younger cohort): What things are the most important?	
Group Table 1	Wildlife and natural landscape preservation; No restrictions on bog/turf essential to everyday rural life; Livestock (food source, livelihoods, support, jobs); Scenery (solitude, walks, peace, the Bogs); Biodiversity; Heritage; Environment (cleaner spaces); Culture; Variety of leisure activities (too focused on sports); Better public transport.
Group Table 2	The scenic peace, space, tranquillity and low crime rate; Better public transport; More primary, secondary schools and third level institutions; Festivals; GAA; Community spirit and groups; Mass/ religion; Employment; Agriculture; Lack of services; Traditional Irish music.
Group Table 3	Pyrite and Mica impacted family homes; Utility expenses (heating); High cost of living (education, housing, transport, fuel, food, inflation); Medical services (GPs, specialists) and support services (mental health, family-based); Lack of transport; More facilities and social activities (including intersectional across age, gender/LGBTQI+, minorities, race and religion); Nature; More non-related sports activities; Bike paths; Lack of facilities for different religious faiths; Childcare costs; Broadband; Pollution and environmental conservation (wind and solar); Accessibility for disabilities; Access to education; Renovation of disused

	buildings; Support for and acceptance of diversity (access and support for disadvantaged people and accepting attitude).
Group Table 4	Quality of air and pollution; Agriculture; Turf cutting; Action and funding; Women in agriculture; Local services; Good food amenities; Youth voices being heard; Transport; Equality; Hospitals; Community; Clubs for youth e.g. GAA; Lower cost of living; Places for youth to socialise; Poor road quality on back roads in rural areas; accountability on how 'toll' money is being spent.
Q1 (Older cohort): What influences the decision to stay or leave?	
Group Table 5	Cannot afford to live in Ireland even with a paid job; feelings of guilt and sense of defeat upon migration for better opportunities and prospects in other countries; rural areas are more isolated; explore more open communities, recreation and entertainment; lack of access to special needs services; to seek better educational opportunities; escape conservative attitudes in rural areas; housing crisis with high purchase prices and rents, and lack of supply combined with Pyrite/Mica crisis; high cost of living in Ireland and low 'living wage'; Inflation;
Group Table 6	Jobs (transport to work and remote working options); Social connectivity; Affordable housing; Standard of living; Lots of racism; Close minded community; Close knit communities have advantages and disadvantages (e.g. rumours); Money; Access to Funding; Pollution; Job availability; Quality of life.
Group Table 7	Education (young people leaving for courses not available in rural Ireland); Educational gender divide (e.g. home and technology); Apprenticeships looked down on (leave for city); Lack of transport (having to get a ferry to school); Family and tradition encourages young people to want to stay; Appeal of glamorises city living; Conservative rural outlooks in relation to LGBT; Inadequate jobs and facilities; Population levels; Conservative mind-set.

Box 2: Key Issues highlighted by breakout session delegates in Activity 1, Question 2

Q2: What are the biggest challenges?	
Group Table 1	Lack of job promotion and work opportunities; Insufficient transport (more stops on local links for work, school and leisure connectivity, long distance links are needed); More entertainment/ hang out locations for young people; Economic challenge for surviving on turf for heat; High fuel prices and low wages; more adult support services; cycle paths and walkways; Lack of investment;

	Broadband connectivity; Biodiversity exploitation; Pollution and environmental protection; Renewable energy.
Group Table 2	Access to services; Lack of funding for rural schools; Isolation in winter (especially during Covid19 Pandemic); Employment; Access to 3rd level education; Broadband connectivity; Healthcare services (long distance to hospitals); Housing; Urban sprawl; Accessing niche hobbies; National emigration (more and more young people leaving rural Ireland); Access to amenities (often nearest shops are 30 minutes or 1 hour away); Policies on agriculture can be punishing; Travel networks; Planning regulations; Urban migration; Infrastructure (e.g. quality of roads).
Group Table 3	Facilities only for GAA; Youth drinking and mental health issues (because there is nothing to do); Insufficient transport (to school/college); Vaping/smoking/drinking/drugs issues (lack of education around addiction); Lack of youth centres; High cost of housing purchase and scarcity of rental accommodation (due to Pyrite/Mica concerns and high demand); Diversity in religious facilities; Insufficient school facilities; Transport costs (fuel); Sports for girls; Limited clothes shops (online shopping impact on climate change); Lack of local medical amenities (cost of long distance care travel); High cost of living.
Group Table 4	Youth employment; Connecting to the buses; Pyrite/Mica housing; Lack of transport; Lack of school buses; Housing and cost of rent; Lack of jobs; Community; Government action; Broadband and Connectivity; Lack of safe places for young people to hangout; There are no social outlets other than GAA; Immigration; Closing of local facilities; Losing teachers; Lack of shop outlets; Women in agriculture don't get noticed or treated fairly; Lack of funding for rural hospitals.
Group Table 5	Access to housing; Lack of transportation and recreational facilities; Young people knowing their rights (with regard to employment, voting); Language is intimidating (use terminology that young people are familiar with/use regularly); Ability to vote (at age 16); Lack of services for people with special needs; Access to education (secondary schools, adult literacy); Conservative attitudes (not open to new cultures/ different groups).
Group Table 6	Fears concerning Mica/Pyrite in new house buy/build; Lack of knowledge on the services available; Cost of retrofitting homes; Lack of affordable accommodation for college students; Housing crisis; Lack of services for young people (leads to

	antisocial behaviour); Education (3rd level course at a higher and more reputable standard in urban areas, CAO school leavers choose to go to urban rather than rural areas); Minimum wages; Lack of public transport and availability; Lack of amenities (things to do); High cost of living (electric vehicles to expensive, fuel costs, inflation); Cost of learning to drive (lessons, relevance of theory test to rural driving, insurance); Transport costs (lack of availability of transport and lack of rail network); Connectivity and Broadband; Isolation (hard to make friends if you're a minority e.g. LGBTQ+).
Group Table 7	Balancing views around climate justice with making a living in farming communities; Access to public transport; Facilities and services for young people; Small student numbers leading to a lack of educational opportunities; Lack of LGBTQ+ education in schools; Lack of mixed school; LGBTQ+ people not being represented in local communities; Public bathrooms; Lack of non-religious primary and secondary schools; Rural issues leading to migration to urban areas (causes housing crisis); Safe lit-up areas for young people to congregate and exercise; Young people's views not being represented in planning permission.

Box 3: Key Issues highlighted by breakout session delegates in Activity 1, Question 3

Q3: Are young people's voices being heard on these issues?	
Group Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No - apart from today! (NRYA). ➤ SPHE, CSPE and well-being need to be taught in school. ➤ Educational system and Local authority system should be improved for hearing youth voices (with an appropriate way for submissions to be made). ➤ Young people could be questioned or interviewed about certain topics about their town and their answers could be taken into consideration. ➤ Small town mind set prevents youth from speaking for what they believe in because they are judged and shunned by older generation and authority figures. ➤ More education on how to have voices heard because young people don't know about youth organisations (young people who volunteer and chose to join action groups are sometimes given the option to speak but

	<p>the majority of young people don't even know these organisations exist).</p>
Group Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Comhairle na nÓg (CNN) is usually held in main towns with long travel distance for rural youths. ➤ CNN is hard to access for youth in some rural counties as opposed to larger cities like Dublin. ➤ School links with council provides some level of voice. ➤ Lack of marketing and promotion for CNN and other youth groups. ➤ More local consultation required with county councils. ➤ Issues involving climate tend to involve youth voices. ➤ There is very limited access to organisations and services that allow your voice to be heard.
Group Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Parents and family and friends listen; No representative to bring issues up with local or central Government officials ➤ We don't see the evidence they hear us (listened to but not heard, won't do anything about it, often feels like it's for show); ➤ There's a need for a liaison that young people can talk with who then goes to the local county council and presents the problem. ➤ There's no one that takes youth voices in rural communities seriously and brings it to people who can help. ➤ Get young people more involved in deciding what rural things young people need. ➤ Voices are heard in CNN. ➤ Need more options to have your voice heard through school because people don't always have the time for organisations like CNN. ➤ Lack of evidence of young people's voices being heard.
Group Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sometimes because some things get through but others don't. ➤ Our voices are being heard but nothing has been done to help. ➤ Our voices are heard but actions aren't taken. ➤ There is too much being talked about but nothing being done. ➤ Often times only at local level. ➤ Young people need to be heard at government level, open those doors to young people!

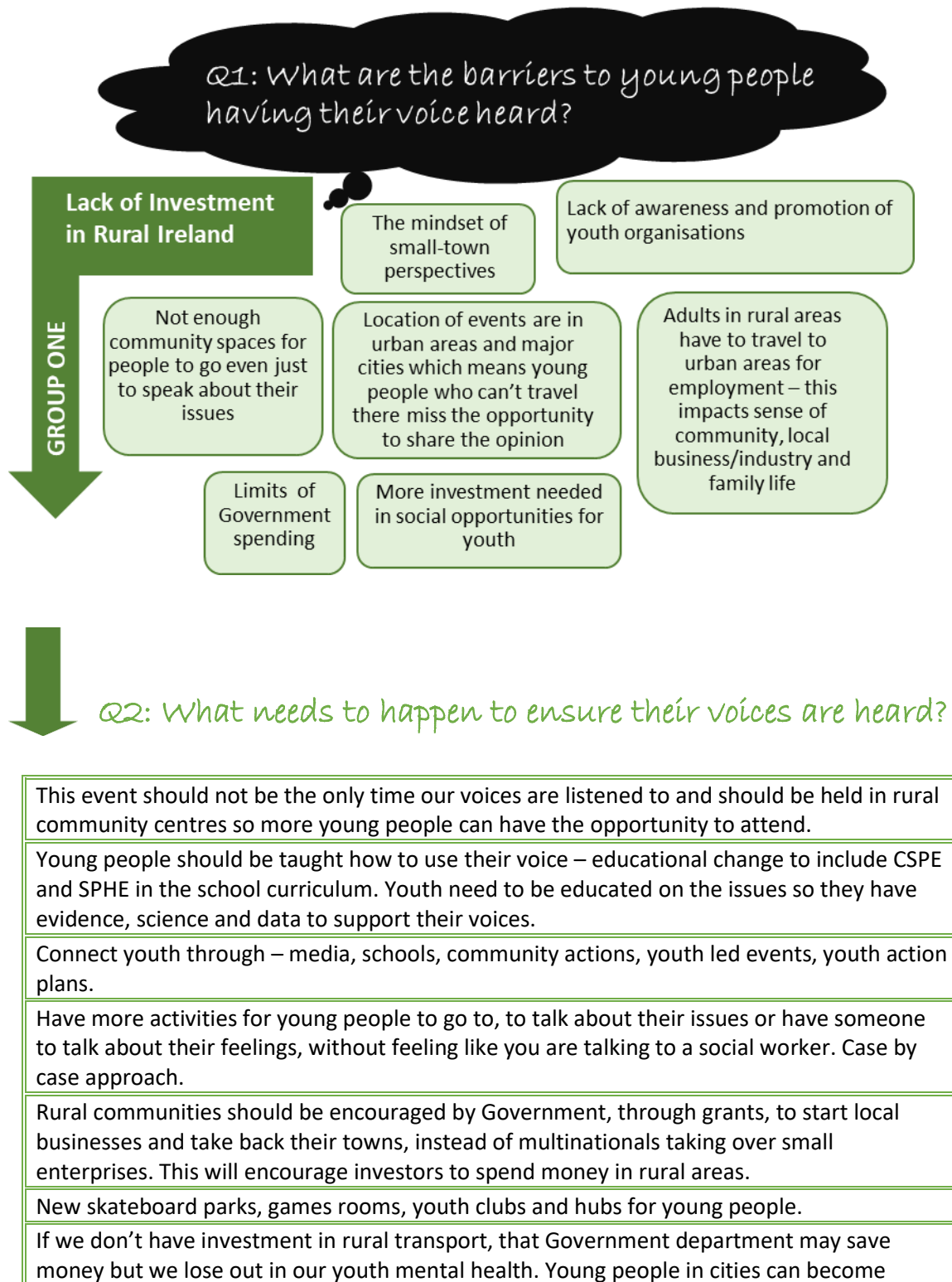
Group Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No. Events like these aren't accessible to young people i.e. wording, big policy. ➤ No. Housing crisis in rural and urban areas with no prospect of home ownership. ➤ No. Language is intimidating, not enough education on important topics in secondary school. ➤ We need more forums like these. We need more awareness on these forums and young people have to be included at the highest level to feel they are seen and heard.
Group Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No. ➤ People don't listen and use money as an excuse to boycott the issues. ➤ Rural students/young people focus groups create policy but implementation is key. ➤ Development of local and city council with legislative/budgeting power. ➤ On the Pyrite/Mica crisis no one is being listened to because we are viewed as the disadvantaged and we feel helpless.
Group Table 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Brushed off as young people don't know any better. ➤ Lack of summer jobs with good pay for young people. ➤ Young people not connected to their rights. ➤ Student voices aren't prioritized in education. ➤ Progress is happening but the people that originally campaigned have outgrown it or given up! ➤ Lack of visibility of young people in roles of authority. ➤ Inclusion of voices is often perceived as tokenism. ➤ Accountability is needed. ➤ Communities need to come together and create development plans that bring the opinions of young, old and migrant or travelling community together.

4.2 Identifying the Priority Areas for Rural Ireland

In Activity 2, the World Café sessions, delegates were asked to discuss the priority areas they identified based on three questions concerning what they feel is required by the DRCD to address and ultimately improve these issues for young people and their communities in rural Ireland. Each

Group Table was asked to consider three questions in relation to their discussion. The findings of these discussions and the questions asked are detailed below for each of the seven Table Groups.

4.2.1 Group Table 1: World Café Question Discussions



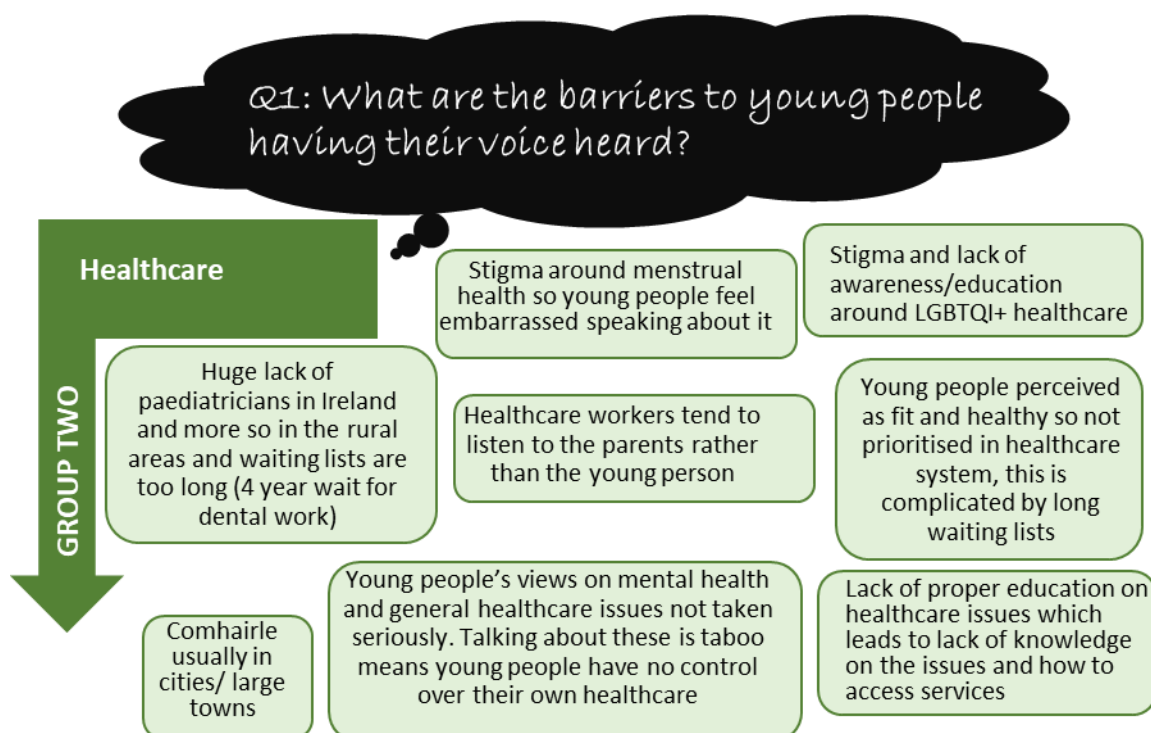
independent earlier as buses and trains more available, but for rural youth independence comes later because of the need to be old enough to drive as public transport is not sufficient.

Government should invest in a more practical way – economy crash!

Q3: What could address the challenges on this topic?

- Think local! Government should invest in rural communities and also provide funding for business owners to start up in their local areas. Increase awareness around Local Enterprise Offices and encourage people to buy locally.
- Increased child benefit and living wage paid to workers.
- More investment in healthcare services locally – shouldn't have to have elderly people travel four hours or more to hospital appointments who may not be able to safely transport themselves or use public transport.
- Travel time for young people from rural areas to have access to events such as this one is long and sometimes not accessible. Leads to lack of rural youth voice.
- Acknowledgement from teachers, principals, Education Board, DCEDIY and within school curriculum that young people must have influence on decisions being made about them.
- Educate young people to have voices to take action and make submissions (business plans, sensitivity training, how government works and about political parties).
- Implement legal vote at 16 years old.

4.2.2 Group Table 2: World Café Question Discussions





Q2: What needs to happen to ensure their voices are heard?

Include youth representatives on local HSE boards – to impact issues such as decrease in waiting list delays, creating more education on health issues for young people, where to go to get treatment and better pay for junior doctors/nurses so they don't leave the country.

Teachers educated on LGBTQIA+ so they can teach children about resources available.

Re-evaluating the entire curriculum in science/biology and SPHE relating to healthcare. Teaching about menstrual health, de-stigmatising mental health and illness and creating resources in school. Having a certified therapist in campus, rather than a chaplain or guidance counsellor who are not qualified to communicate with teens about youth mental health and other healthcare issues.

Schools should have youth coordinators.

More attention to events like this and create more publicity around youth involvement.

Having a more 'human lens' when parents are making decisions for children – young person being able to have a personal chat with designated GP. Health workers should be allowed to talk to the young person without parent's consent.

Young people are labelled as 'young, fit and healthy' and are therefore assumed to have little knowledge, understanding or personal experience, thus wrongly assuming we don't know what we are talking about in health related issues.

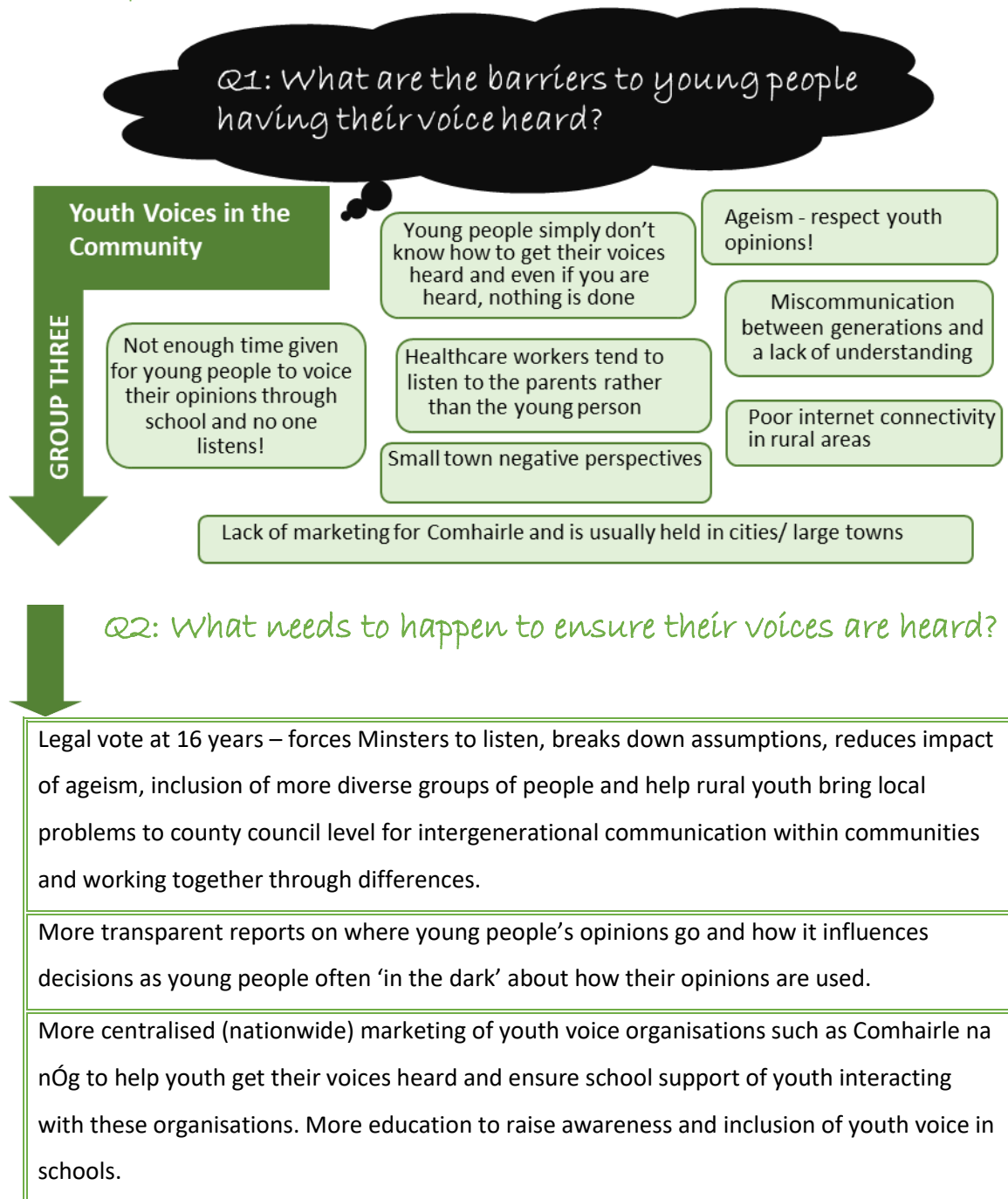


Q3: What could address the challenges on this topic?

- Increase Government spending in healthcare sector overall:
 - More beds for patients.
 - Creation of local health resources in the community, specifically for youth around healthcare.
 - Have additional care facilities and services in all county hospitals to minimise the wait lists and travel distances to regional hospitals.
 - Dentist, doctor hospitals in all towns for countrywide accessibility to all healthcare services.
 - Better treatment of junior doctors/nurses – less hours, more pay – to prevent them from leaving the country for better working conditions.

- Capital investment for hospitals and in medical training programmes to increase healthcare staff.
- Small, simple yet vital parts of healthcare should be taught in science subjects in secondary schools, especially ones not near hospitals.
- Healthy lifestyle initiatives for primary schools and encourage all sports, not just GAA.
- Bringing the age down to 14 years for private consultations with a young person, if approved by GP and/or parental consent is given.

4.2.3 Group Table 3: World Café Question Discussions

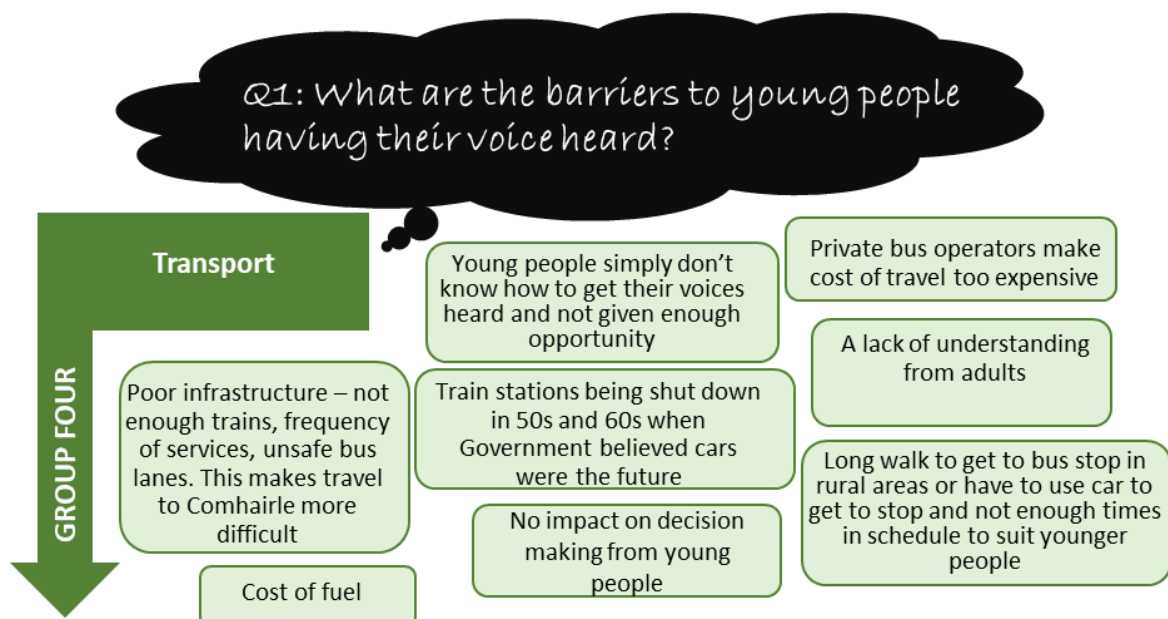


A wider variety of events should be held for youth voice such as debates about trending topics within young people's communities to include diverse spectrum of opinions.

Q3: What could address the challenges on this topic?

- More inclusion regarding gender and interests in regard to how young people live in the 21st century.
- Have better school guidance counsellors and create 'opinion boxes' where young people can have their opinions logged anonymously.
- More advertising of organisations like Comhairle na nÓg (leaflets, social media), more encouragement to participate and greater supports for participation. Greater transparency on the national level follow-up of young people's perspectives. Include multi-generational participation (to increase empathy and understanding between generations) and increase number of assemblies held to show true commitment to hearing youth voices.
- More opportunities for youth volunteering in community and more opportunities to have meetings between different age groups (i.e. friends of the elderly).
- Enhanced communication with local councillors and council department officials so youth can influence and have access to decision-makers.
- Creation of jobs that pay a decent living wage to attract people to local areas.

4.2.4 Group Table 4 - World Café Question Discussions





Q2: What needs to happen to ensure their voices are heard?

Governments being open-minded towards young people – increased cooperation and showing us what changes we have actually influenced. Implementation and action on consultation with young people.

Creating a direct channel of communication with Minister for Transport on issues such as consultation with local youths around transport times that suit them and the need for accessible transport to all hospitals and medical facilities.

As public transport largely affects young people's lives, we should be included more with regard to transport decisions, and also be aware of how to get involved and influence those decisions.

Make all Ministers and T.D.'s live in rural Ireland for a month so they can experience the hardships.

Adults need to listen to the young people and take action on what they say!

There should be more Youth Assemblies so we can express our ideas and concerns.

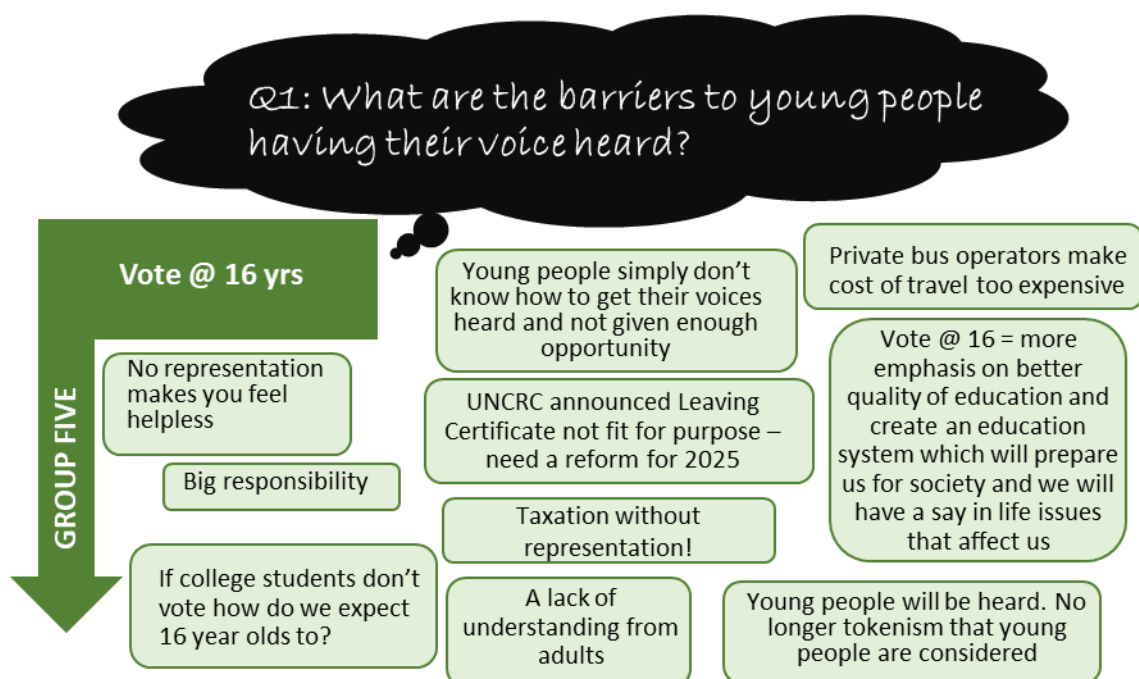
More bus and train transport, links and stops so we can all attend Youth Assemblies to have our voice heard.



Q3: What could address the challenges on this topic?

- More government spending in the transport sector – electric cars should be the cheaper to buy than petrol and diesel and there should be more electric car charging stations in rural villages.
- Make public transport more affordable to youth and families and have more reliable services with more links in communities, between towns and counties so youth can walk to bus/train stop from home safely. Evaluation of bus routes and creation of additional bus stops and expansion of national rail network.
- More facilities/services in rural Ireland so we don't have long journeys on public transport to access facilities/services in other urban areas.
- Increased number of quality cycle paths and implementation of new ones in rural areas.
- Anonymous polls asking the public what are the issues with transport in Ireland.
- Making sure rural counties are not forgotten and all of rural Ireland is improved.
- Carpooling.

4.2.5 Group Table 5 - World Café Question Discussions



- Reform of CSPE module in education system to include a fit for purpose rights based education and workshops on how to vote to create voting education and awareness (PRSTV, the basics of politics and how it influences your life.
- Legal vote at 16 years (within reason). Power to the People!
- Political literacy and access to non-biased information – an awareness of this in schools and where young people gather.
- Lobbying T.D.'s and councillors.
- Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Right to Vote at 16) Bill 2021 by Deputy Thomas Pringle⁸

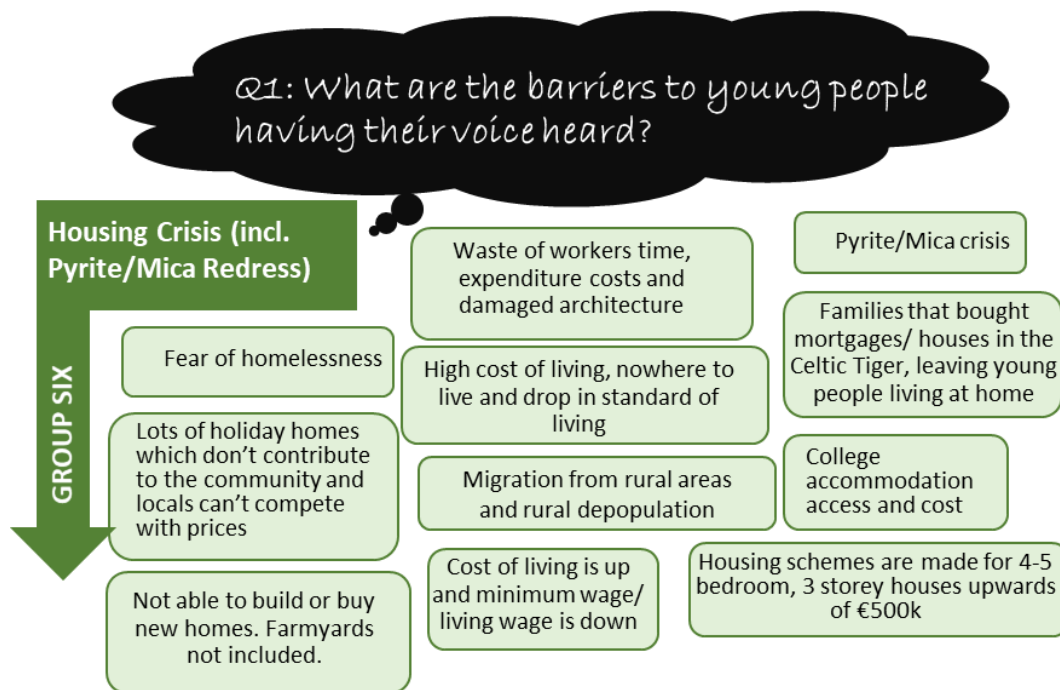
⁸ Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Right to Vote at 16) Bill 2021 No. 67 of 2021. For further details please see <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2021/67/>



Q3: What could address the challenges on this topic?

- More awareness of 'We are the Future!'
- Take action, enough talking, more working!
- Political education in the mainstream system and young people engaging at the highest political level.
- Give us the vote in all elections, including in the European elections, referendums and local elections.
- Pass the Bill #Vote@16!
- Amend the constitution to allow for the vote at 16 years old.

4.2.6 Group Table 6 - World Café Question Discussions



Q2: What needs to happen to ensure their voices are heard?

- More accessible planning permission.
- Homeless people should be provided with proper support and accommodation.
- Issues regarding poverty need to be approached differently, i.e. drug use, housing prices, mental health, Gardaí system should be changed and focused on helping.

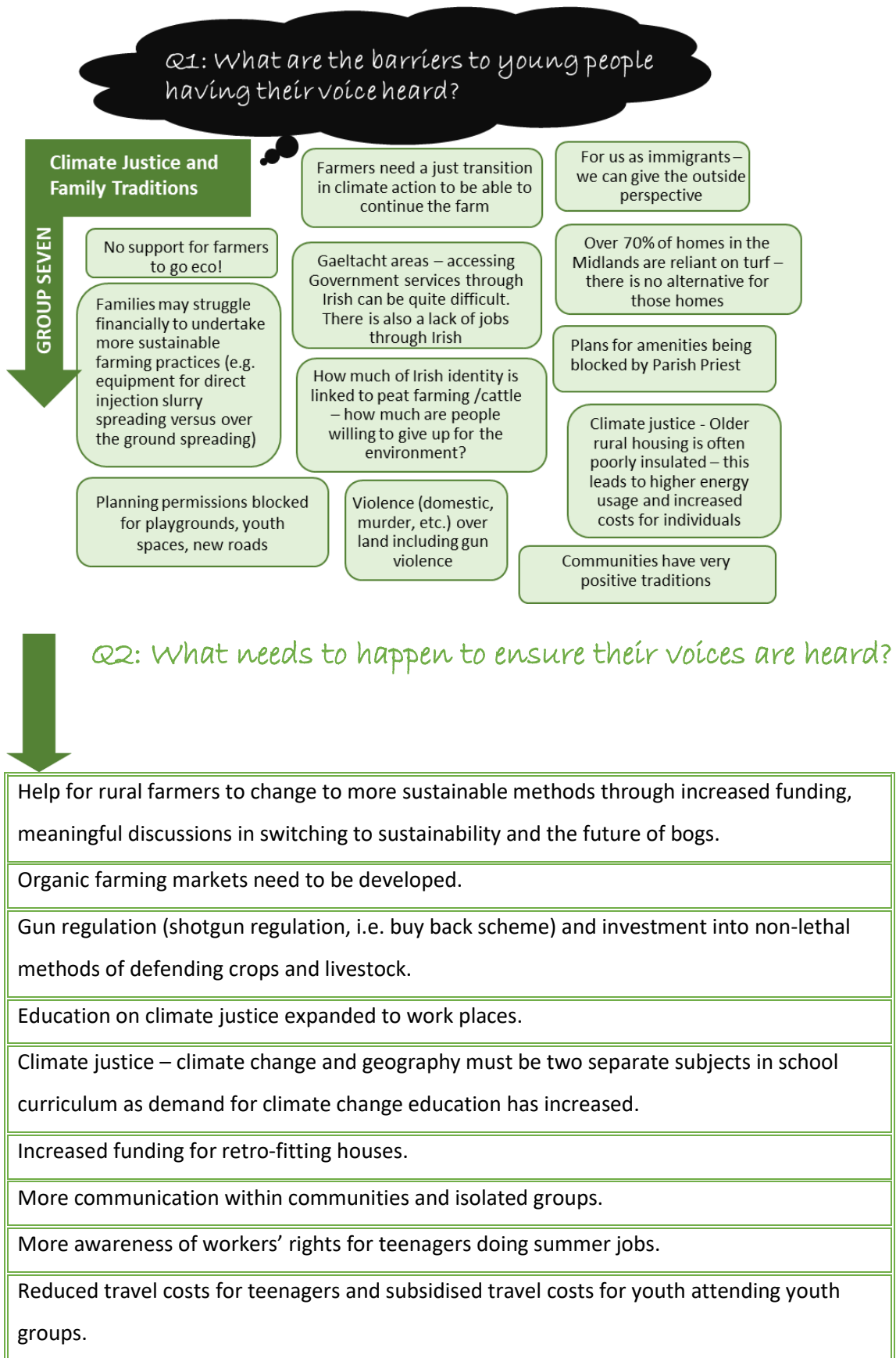
More than only commitment or promises from the Government!
Direct provision (homeless people are forced into sex work).
100% redress for people impacted by the Pyrite/Mica crisis.
Help people/families impacted by Pyrite/Mica crisis find somewhere to live while house is being rebuilt.
Refurbish derelict houses or shop fronts and form supports for communities to support less fortunate people.
Increase vacant property tax.
More support for essential services in rural Ireland, e.g. post offices.
Create funding for people who want to buy 'fixer-upper's' rather than new builds.



Q3: What could address the challenges on this topic?

- Planning permission reforms and more access to the planners in County Councils.
- Invest in abandoned properties.
- Funding of first time buyers to incentivise buyers to buy derelict/ 'fixer uppers' versus new houses.
- Listen to affected families – consult with Pyrite/Mica action group for solutions and legislate for a 100% redress scheme.
- Restricting hedge funds from mass buying new housing estates in order to rent them – family buyers should be prioritised.
- Have housing schemes that promise affordable housing (i.e. not 6 bathroom, 5 bedroom housing estates).
- Minimum wage and living wage are planned to combine into one 'national wage' by 2025.
- Fair and actual change to be brought in immediately - €12.50 won't be the living wage in 2025.
- Excuses/stereotypes in police reports should be stamped out.
- Complete reform of direct provision.
- Attention to supply of accommodation for students and more 3rd level grant systems (HEAR, SUSI).

4.2.7 Group Table 7 - World Café Question Discussions



Increased outreach of LGBTQI+ youth organisations to schools.

Communities should not be prevented from developing due to older locals resisting change.

More advertising of supports available to develop rural areas.

Irish language survival suffering, loss of Ireland's traditional music and lack of community (groups and events).



What could address the challenges on this topic?

- Provide more environmental schemes and come up with more solutions. Climate literacy and innovative critical thinking.
- Protection of bogs and peat farmers.
- Accessible education resources for farmers for more sustainable farming methods.
- Grants for farmers in order to undertake sustainable farming practices (equipment, training, etc.).
- Legislation restricting further gun access and providing grants to farmers to implement non-lethal methods of protecting livestock and crops.
- Reach out to older farmers and be mindful of eco-anxiety in youth.
- Create spaces and a platform where younger and older generations can communicate, like 'town hall chats' (greenwashing, SDGs).
- More off-shore renewable energy, utilise our seas for energy and school planning permission for solar panels. Ensure marginalised youth are heard in these discussions.
- Implement legal vote at 16 years old.
- Separate climate change and geography and teach as two separate subjects in school.

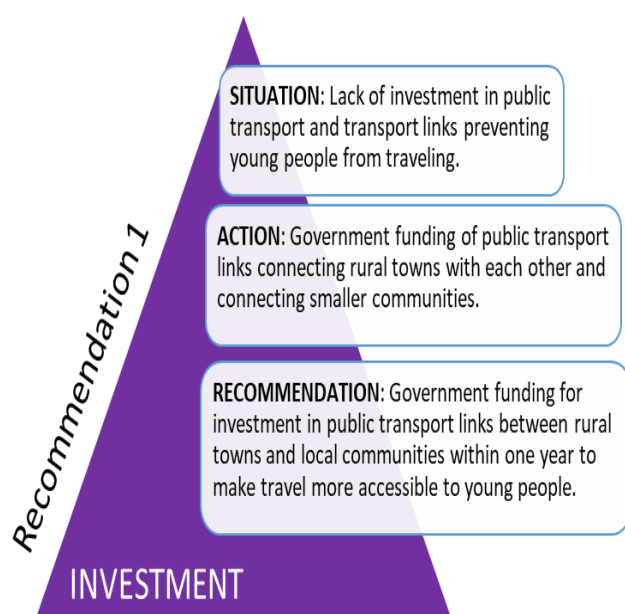
SECTION 5: National Rural Youth Assembly Recommendations

The NRYA delegates first discussed their top two recommendations within their seven Group Tables. After this discussion each Group Table decided on the number one key recommendation to Minister Humphreys and the DRCD. In the final Activity of the day, the seven key recommendations of the 2022 NRYA were then presented to DRCD to be passed on to the Minister for her consideration.

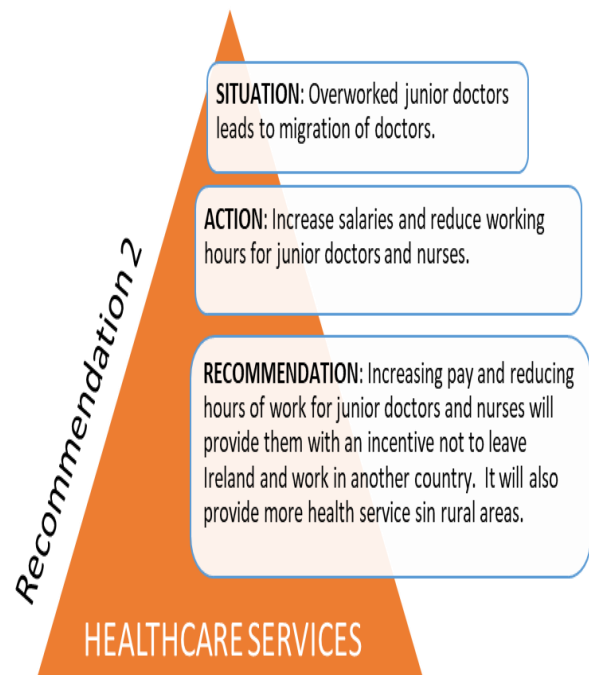
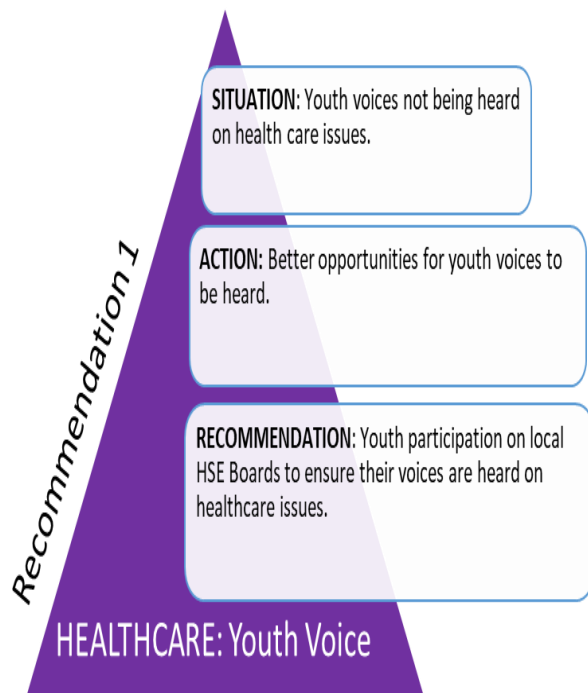
5.1 Discussion of Potential Recommendations

Group Table delegates voted on their top two recommendations to the DRCD, this was to ensure that if two Group Tables picked the same topic they could have another recommendation to put forward. The recommendations by the delegates were based on their definition of the current situation/problem; what changes are needed/suggested by delegates to take action to resolve the situation/problem, thus leading to an achievable and timely outcome. Each Group Table's feedback is recorded below.

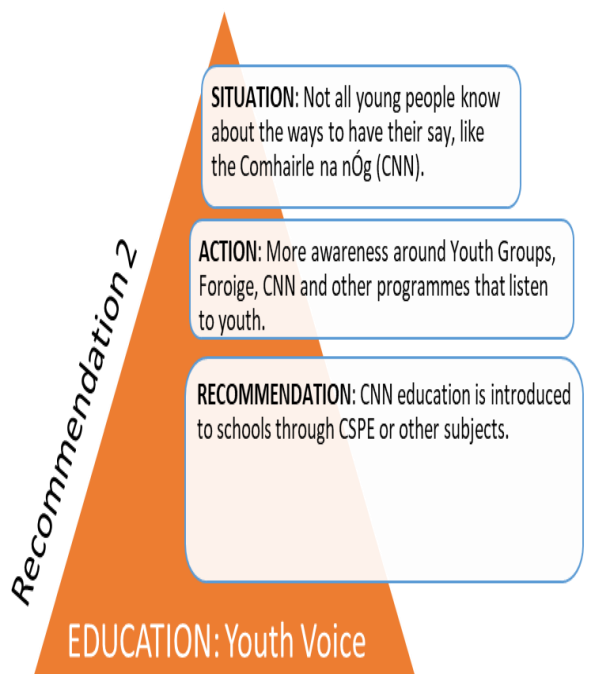
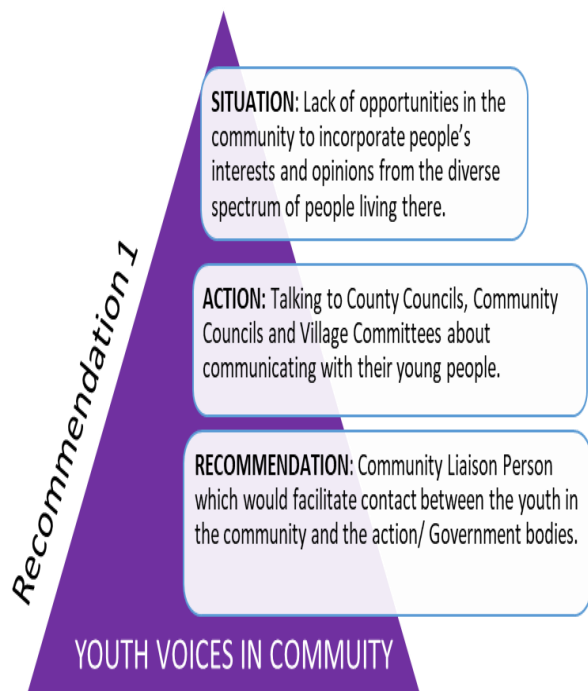
5.1.1 Group Table 1: Top Two Recommendations



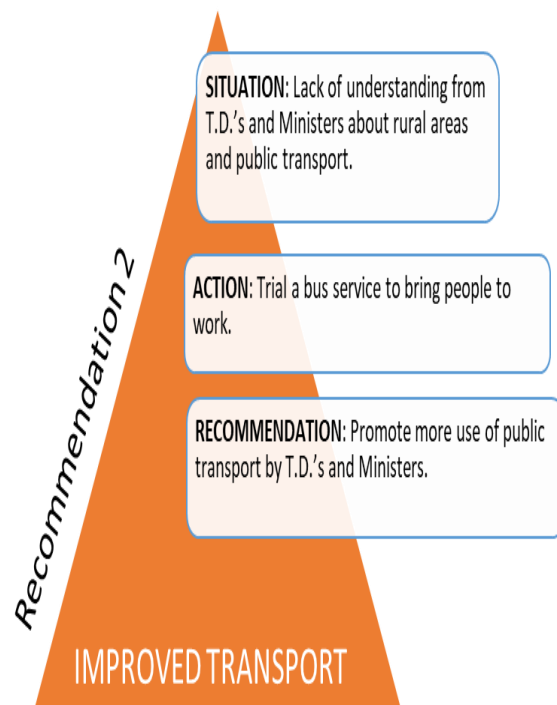
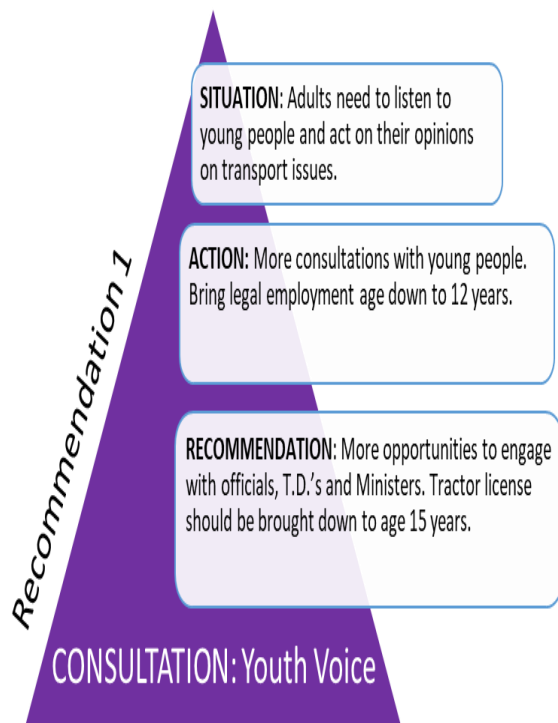
5.1.2 Group Table 2: Top Two Recommendations



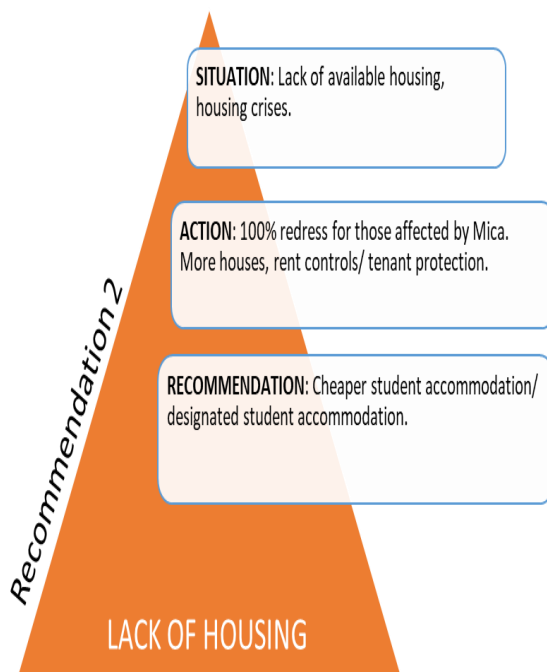
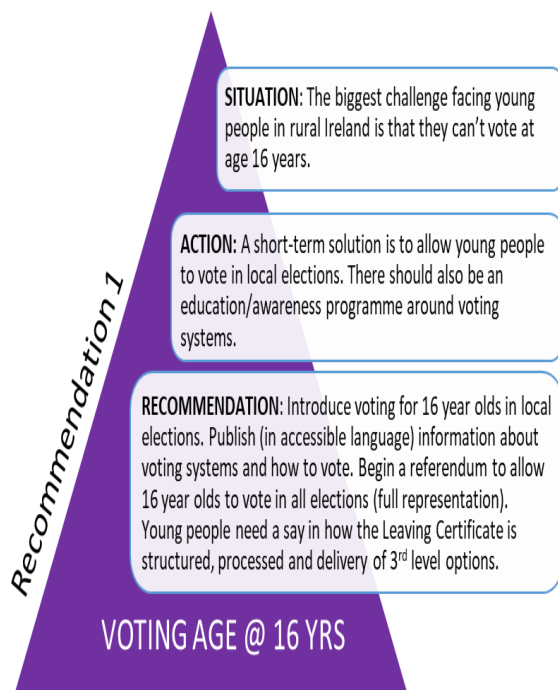
5.1.3 Group Table 3: Top Two Recommendations



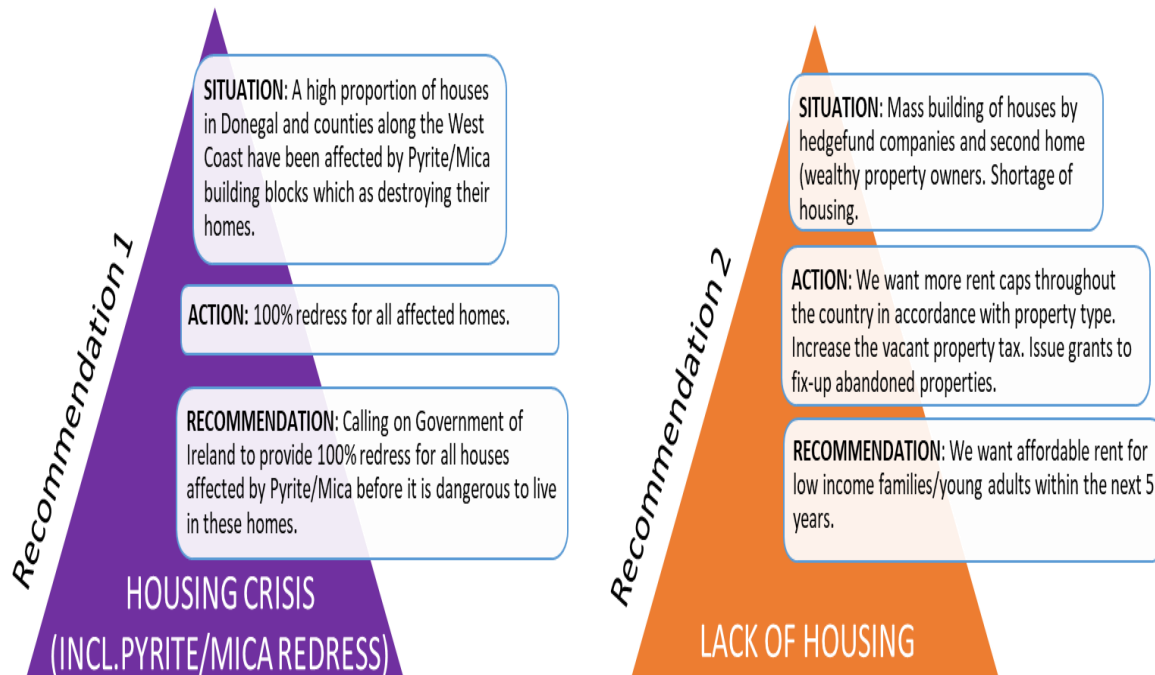
5.1.4 Group Table 4: Top Two Recommendations



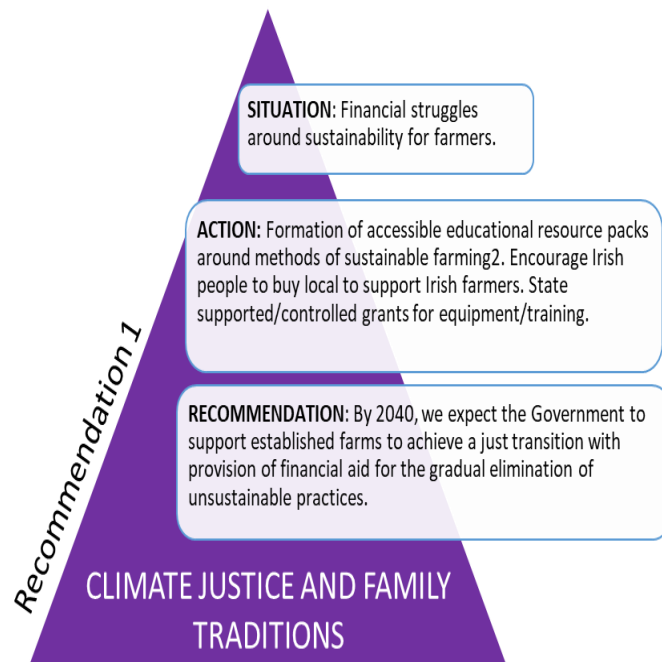
5.1.5 Group Table 5: Top Two Recommendations



5.1.6 Group Table 6: Top Two Recommendations



5.1.7 Group Table 7: Top Two Recommendations



Note: Group 7 only completed one recommendation in this session of the NRYA.

5.2 National Rural Youth Assembly (2022) Seven Key Recommendations to DRCD

Each Group Table then nominated their top single recommendation to DRCD at the end of the afternoon sessions. These were:

Group Table	Issue	NRYA 2022 Top 7 Recommendations for DRCD
1	Investment	Government funding for investment in public transport links between rural towns and local communities within one year to make travel more accessible to young people.
2	Healthcare: Youth Voice	Youth participation on local HSE Boards to ensure their voices are heard on healthcare issues.
3	Youth Voices in Community	Community Liaison Person which would facilitate contact between the youth in the community and the action/Government bodies.
4	Improved Transport	More consultation opportunities with T.D.'s and Ministers about public transportation issues. Tractor license should be brought down to age 15 years.
5	Vote @ 16	Introduce voting for 16 year olds in local elections. Publish information on voting systems and how to vote in accessible language. Begin a process for a Referendum allowing 16 year-olds to vote in all elections (full representation). Young people need a say in how Leaving Certificate is structured, processed and delivery of 3 rd level options.
6	Housing Crisis (incl. Pyrite/Mica Redress)	Calling on Government of Ireland to provide 100% redress for all houses affected by Pyrite/Mica before it is dangerous to live in these homes.
7	Climate Justice and Family Traditions	By 2040, we expect the Government to support established farms to achieve a just transition with provision of financial aid for the gradual elimination of unsustainable practices.

Appendices

Appendix 1: National Rural Youth Assembly Running Order



Running Order

10.30am Registration and refreshments

11.00am Welcome

- Welcome and Housekeeping
 - Welcome and Child Safeguarding and handover to YAG member
 - Housekeeping

11.10am Opening by Minister O’Gorman

- Welcome from Minister O’Gorman

11.20am Department of Rural and Community Development

- Welcome Video from Minister Humphreys
- Feedback on progress from the precursor Rural Youth Assembly in 2021 by DRCD rep

11.30am Ice breaker and online contribution

- Ice Breaker Divide delegates into their seats through an activity.
- Online contribution - What does Rural Ireland mean to you (Mentimeter slides)
Word cloud - This to be shown on the screen in room

11.45am Breakout Sessions

12.30pm Lunch

- Facilitators to meet to identify the priority topics and divide amongst themselves.
- Video area/ vox pops/ Wall of ideas open during lunch

1.15pm World Cafe

2.00pm Voting

- Sticky dot voting to be used.

2.10pm Movement Break

- Facilitator's choice

2.20pm Preparation of Recommendations

2.35pm Presentation of Recommendations to the Minister (or a representative)

- Feedback will go table by table (one recommendation per table)

3.00pm Closing remarks from Minister Humphreys (Or a representative)

3.10pm Things to note and Close Event (YAG member)

3.15-4.00pm- Tidy up/ Collection of sheets

- Facilitator debrief meeting



Breakout Session 1 - 11.45am - 12.30pm

- Welcome group to table
- Round of introductions
- Ice breaker.
 - **Tablemat 1 What things are the most important to young people living in rural Ireland?**
 - What are the best things about living in rural Ireland
 - What is important to young people in rural areas
 - **What are the biggest challenges?**
 - Encourage them to think about different areas of their lives (family, community, school, future plans.
 - **Are young people's voices heard on these topics?** (The challenges and the positives)
 - Do they get a chance to input into decisions being made
 - Where does this happen
 - Should it happen more?
- Prioritise the area/challenge that the group think are most important to bring forward to recommendations - Agree as a group (sticky dot voting) Three votes per person. They can use all their votes on their favourite option or spread their votes out. Agree as a table on the top two priority

12.30 - 1.15pm Lunch

1.15pm - 2.00pm World Cafe and Voting

- **1.15pm - 1.30pm: Priority Area 1 _____**
 - What are the barriers to rural young people having a voice in this area?
 - What needs to happen to ensure their voices are heard?
 - What could address the challenges on this topic?
- **1.30pm - 1.40pm: Priority Area 2 _____**

- **1.40pm - 1.50pm: Priority Area 3** _____

- Delegates go back to their original seats and review the table.

2.00pm-2.10pm: Delegates Vote on the top 2 ideas they want to move forward to recommendations. Sticky dot voting to be used. One of these recommendations will be fed back to the DRCD. The second is there in case two tables make very similar recommendations or the first recommendation is already being done by the department. 1 young person to volunteer to feedback the recommendations on behalf of the rest of the group.

2.10pm - 2.15pm - Movement Break

2.15pm - 2.35pm - Recommendations

Review with group how they are feeling at this stage in the day

- Is there anything they felt they haven't had a chance to say on ANY topic that is relevant to today? - Use the comments page for these.
- Give the volunteer the feedback sheet to make notes (if they wish)
- Recommendation Sheet:
 - As a group work through the two top voted recommendations and break them down into the three sections (Situation, Action, Solution)
 - Agree as a table on the top recommendation to feed back to the DRCD today.
 - Agree on a wording for the volunteer to feedback the recommendations.
 - Run through and gain agreement from the table.

2.35pm - Feedback of 1 recommendation from the table to the Minister/representative.

Methodology for Facilitators

Group 2 - 18+ year olds - Living in Rural Ireland

Breakout Session 1 - 11.45am - 12.30pm

- Welcome group to table
- Round of introductions
- Ice breaker.
- **Tablemat 1 - (Facilitator to give some background)**

- **What are the challenges for young adults in rural Ireland?**
 - Encourage them to think about different areas of their lives (family, community, school, future plans).
- **Are young people's voices heard on these issues?**
 - Do they get a chance to input into decisions being made
 - Where does this happen
 - Should it happen more?
- **What influences the decision to stay or leave?**

Prioritise the challenges of most importance to young adults in Rural Ireland - Agree as a group (sticky dot voting) **12.30pm - 1.15pm - Lunch**

1.15 - 2.00pm World Cafe and Voting

- **1.15pm - 1.30pm: Priority Area 1** _____
 - How does this challenge affect young adults?
 - What needs to happen? (to address this challenge)
 - What actions could improve this? (ideas, recommendations, what could the DRCD do)
- **1.30pm - 1.40pm: Priority Area 2** _____
- **1.40pm - 1.50pm: Priority Area 3** _____

Delegates go back to their original seats and review the table.

2.00pm-2.10pm: Delegates Vote on the top 2 ideas on the table they want to move forward to recommendations. Sticky dot voting to be used. One of these recommendations will be fed back to the DRCD. The second is there in case two table make very similar recommendations or the first recommendation is already being done by the department. 1 young person to volunteer to feedback the recommendations on behalf of the rest of the group.

2.10pm - 2.15-pm - Movement Break

2.15pm - 2.35pm - Recommendations

Review with group how they are feeling at this stage in the day

- Is there anything they felt they haven't had a chance to say on ANY topic that is relevant to today? - Use the comments page for these.
- Give the volunteer the feedback sheet to make notes (if they wish)
- Recommendation Sheet:
 - As a group work through the two top voted recommendations and break them down into the three sections (Situation, Action, Solution)
 - Agree as a table on the top recommendation to feed back to the DRCD today.
 - Agree on a wording for the volunteer to feedback the recommendations.
 - Run through and gain agreement from the table.

2.35pm - Feedback of 1 recommendation from the table to the Minister/representative.

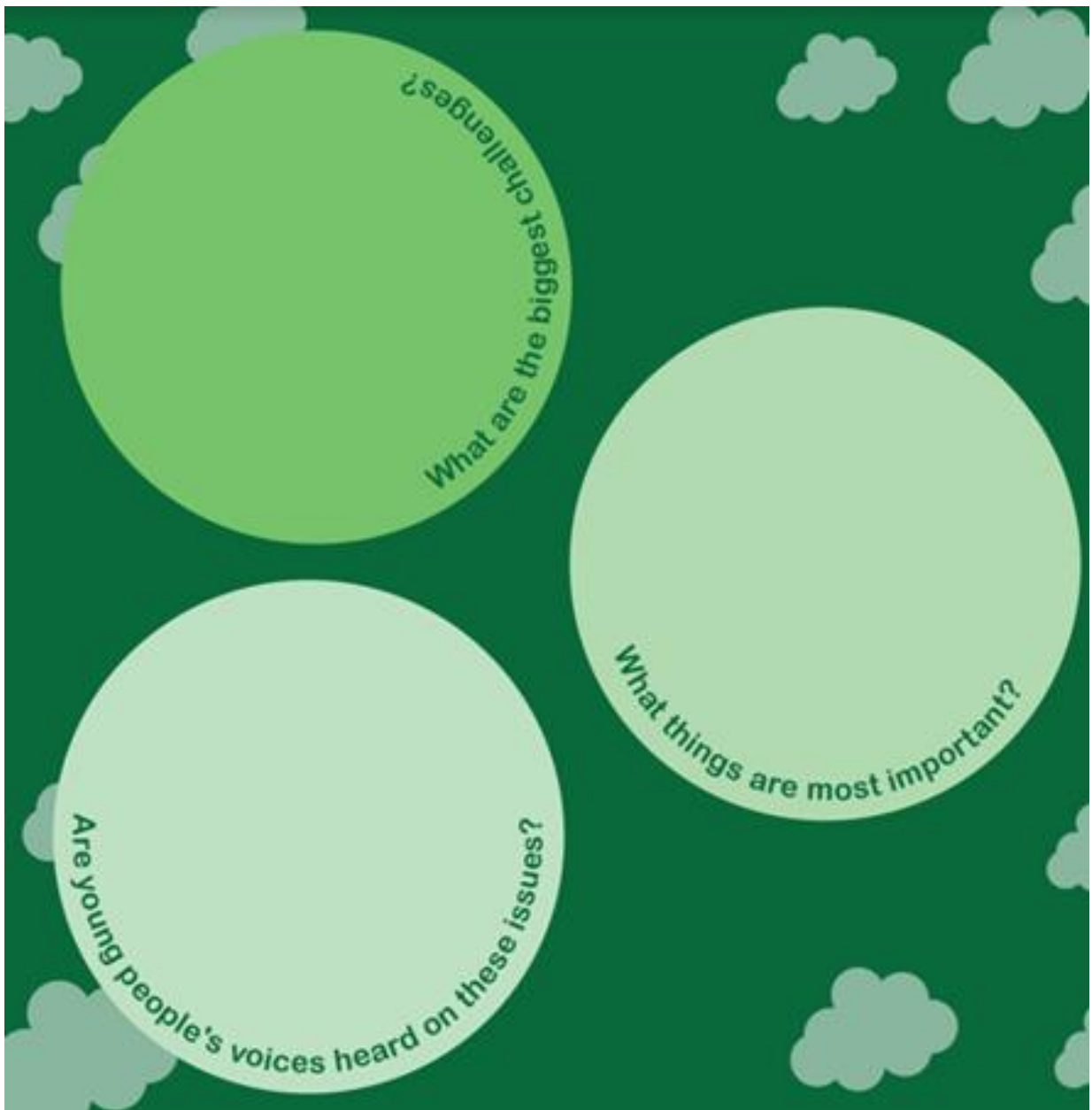
Appendix 2: Time Table for Preparation Session



National Rural Youth Assembly 2022 Time Table for Preparation Session

10.25am	Log in
10.30am	Welcome and Housekeeping
10.40am	Introduction by Eileen Leahy - Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) And Sinead Quinn - Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)
10.55am	Presentation from Rural Youth Assembly 2021 and response from DRCD
11.15am	Break (5min)
11.20am	Breakout room - Delegates networking
11.35am	Expert Panel and Q&A session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peter - Rural Youth ● Dr Karen Keaveney - UCD ● Rachel Foody - Rural Young Adult
12.20pm	Breakout room - Delegates Discussion time
12.35pm	Breakout room - Questions for Minister and DRCD
1pm	Close

Appendix 3: Breakout Session Placemat



Appendix 4: World Cafe Placemat



Appendix 5: Recommendations Sheet and Guidance Sheet

Recommendations

Age Group Table topic

1

Situation Action

Recommendation

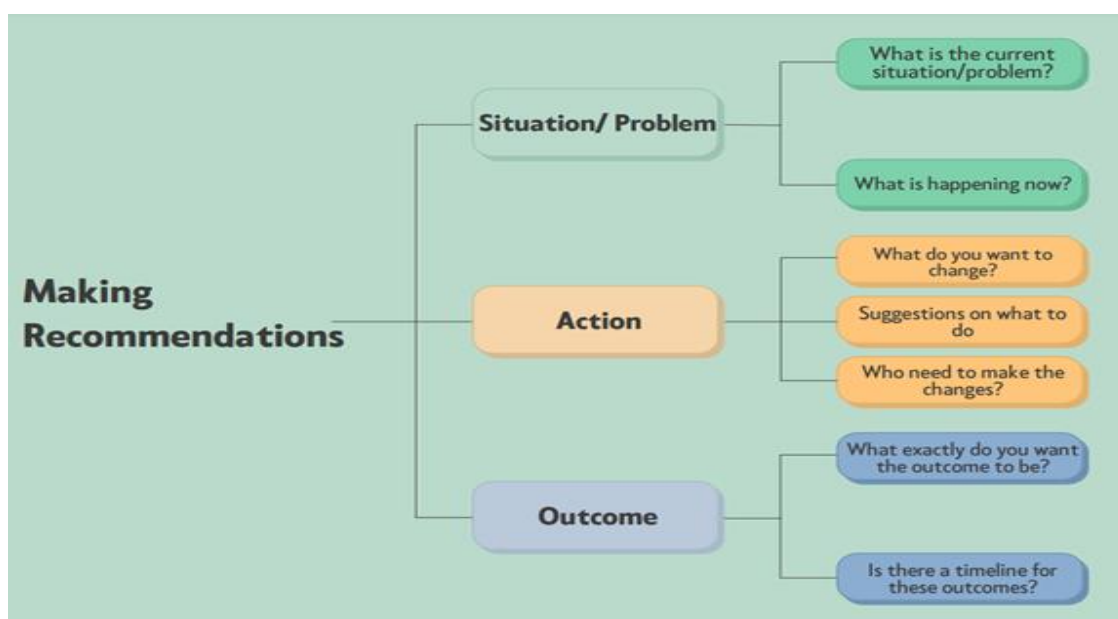
2

Situation Action

Recommendation

Making Recommendations

- Situation/ Problem
 - What is the current situation/problem?
 - What is happening now?
- Action
 - What do you want to change?
 - Suggestions on what to do
 - Who need to make the changes?
- Outcome
 - What exactly do you want the outcome to be?
 - Is there a timeline for these outcomes?

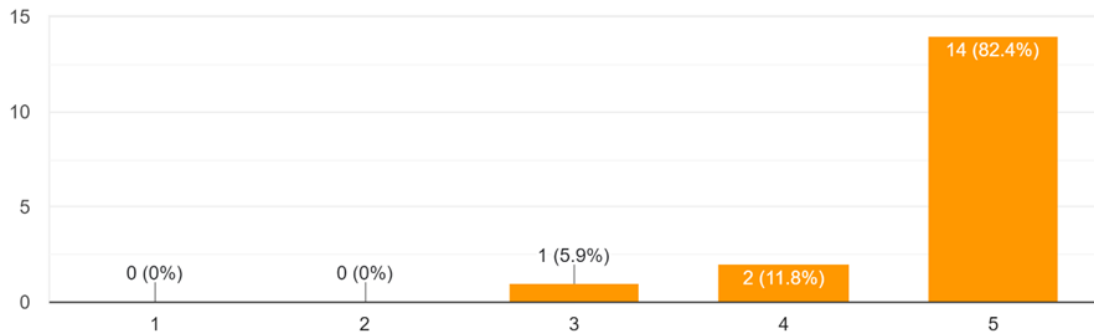


Appendix 6: National Rural Youth Assembly Evaluation Process

The evaluation process involved 6 questions, a total of 17 delegates from the NRYA participated in the evaluation process. The responses from delegates are noted below for each question asked within the evaluation process at the end of the Assembly.

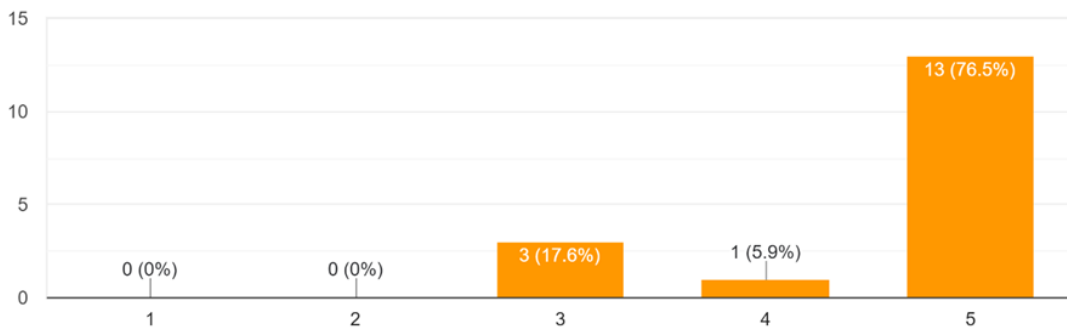
1. Space - I felt comfortable giving my opinions

17 responses



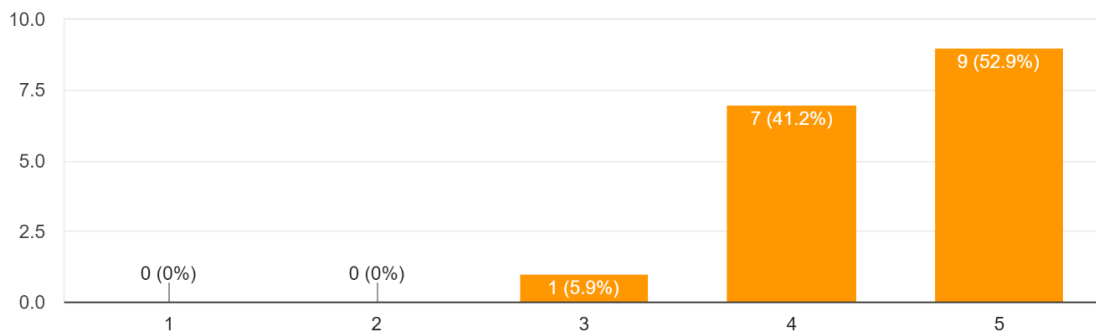
2. Voice - I got the chance to give my opinions

17 responses



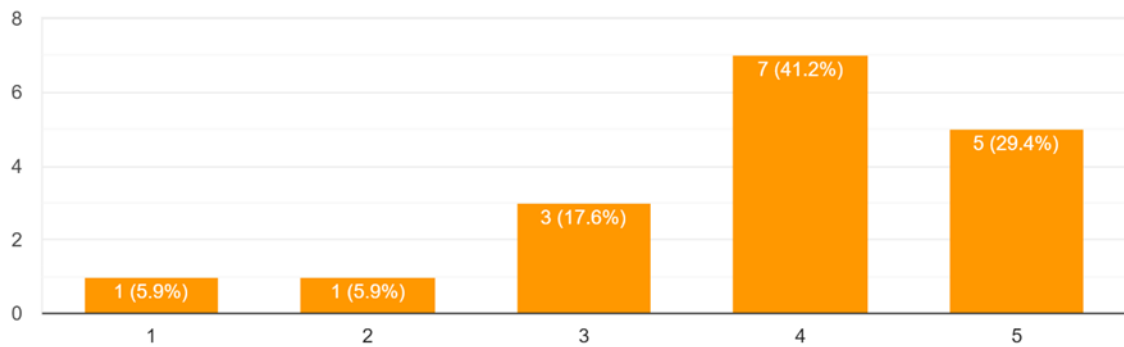
3. Audience - I know who wants our opinions and why they want them

17 responses



4. Influence - I think our opinions will be taken seriously

17 responses



5. What was the best thing about the Assembly? (17 responses)

- ✓ Meeting new people
- ✓ In person event
- ✓ The whole day
- ✓ The vox pops and meeting the delegates in person
- ✓ Meeting everyone in real life! The discussions at our tables. Having the option to go to the quiet room was welcome too.
- ✓ Icebreaker games
- ✓ Talking to everyone from loads of different youth committees, sharing my opinion and feeling heard
- ✓ Meeting all the young people
- ✓ The tables where you could write on them
- ✓ Getting a general feeling of how the youth of Ireland feel about urbanisation
- ✓ Getting the chance to meet other rural people and not only discuss the issues we face but to make friends as well.
- ✓ Everything, best youth voice event I've been to
- ✓ I was sure my voice was heard and would be taken into account
- ✓ Meeting new people interested in improving our country
- ✓ Stephaine, Renagh and the other co-coordinators' friendliness
- ✓ Getting to talk about my opinions
- ✓ Meeting everyone and bouncing ideas off one another

6. What would you change about the Assembly? (17 responses)

- Nothing
- I would change some of the questions on the world cafe posters.
- Make it a few days to get more fleshed out actions. Have it been a 2-3 day event and have each day focus on something else and have delegates really give their opinions to get exactly what young people want to see changed.
- The timing
- Not have a rural assembly in Dublin. Make it an hour longer, with some more ice breakers. More facilitators for lunch time as I found myself trying to make sure younger members weren't alone but this was difficult due to me being 18 and them not being 18 (I ended up just inviting them to join our mixed age group for the lunch). Less fancy food, to be honest.
- The food
- Perhaps more options for dietary restrictions!
- Have more people speaking at the event
- Nothing really I found it great
- More time to discuss ideas
- I think I'd give more instructions on what to do during the recommendations sheet
- I would give more of a chance for different age groups to interact, we were put in groups with people of similar ages which is good for a base group but it would've been nice to have a chance to talk to younger and older people as well
- I felt like it was difficult for everyone to speak in the group and 1-2 voices dominated continuously.
- Possibly the location if transport links in the country approve! Alternate between Dublin, Galway, Cork, Limerick, Sligo, Letterkenny, etc.
- Nothing the event was brilliant
- I would have liked to have heard about the current plans in action for rural areas I a bit more detail than was provided
- The time, start an hour later and finish an hour later.

Any other comments? (17 responses)

- ❖ No
- ❖ Really enjoyable day
- ❖ None
- ❖ It was an amazing experience
- ❖ Thank you so much for organising it! I had a genuinely fulfilling time.
- ❖ N/A
- ❖ Thank you so much for having me!
- ❖ No other comments
- ❖ This was really enjoyable and we got to discuss our ideas and things that affect us and I feel we came up with amazing ideas and recommendations however at times it felt like just a photo opportunity
- ❖ Maybe make it a little easier when yer moving around the tables so that people know where they're going
- ❖ No
- ❖ I thought a possible solution for people getting talked over in my group would've been to have a sign or something for us to hold when we have something to say or add to the point someone is currently making, that way people know and can let you go next. Similar to putting up your hand at a zoom meeting.
- ❖ No, it was a brilliant event :))
- ❖ None
- ❖ Overall I had a fun and informative day and it is very clear the benefit of the Assembly
- ❖ No, thank you, it was a great day!



Update on progress since the inaugural Rural Youth Assembly

16 November 2021

The report and recommendations of the inaugural Rural Event Assembly will be brought to the attention of the Minister for Rural and Community Development and a formal report will issue shortly to the Assembly responding to the recommendations.

In the meantime, provided below is a summary of updates of some of what has happened since then in relation to the recommendations made and progress in other areas of relevance to young people.

1. **Department of Rural and Community Development** has advocated for the consideration of Young People, and their needs, on 7 occasions since November 2021. These inputs include:
 - **School Transport Scheme Review** (Department of Education)
 - **Heritage Ireland 2030** (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage)
 - **All-Island Strategic Rail Review** (Department of Transport)

2. Increase remote and blended learning to improve access to further and higher education:

Education Training Boards (ETBs) and service providers have worked intensively to ensure that Further Education Training (FET) continues to reach as many people across society as possible, achieved by finding ways to deliver essential practical and technical training onsite, continuing to support and engage with learners, offering blended learning solutions and an increased portfolio of online offerings.

eCollege was opened to public applications in March 2020, with 34,223 new entrants joining courses in 2020. As a fully online service, eCollege supports learners from across Ireland, including rural areas, to access further education, offering very flexible online learning.

3. **Integrating young newcomers to rural towns and villages and supporting cohesion.** Comhairlí have committed to developing actions to support the participation of minority young people, including migrants, in Comhairle na nÓg.

4. Support wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development of the creative sector.

Close collaboration with local government has also been central to the Creative Ireland Programme's implementation of its flagship initiative, Cruinniú na nÓg, the national day of free creativity for children and young people. The investment in 2021 included €789,875

that delivered 637 projects under Cruinniú na nÓg, employing 900 creatives from the sector.

5. Creative Ireland Programme supported specific creative initiatives in 2021 including positive ageing, mental wellbeing, disability, diversity, equality and inclusion initiatives.

In 2021, 81 projects were supported by Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYP) which focused on providing greater opportunities for the previously less heard or marginalised young people to engage with and experience the joy of creative activities.

Some initiatives to promote cultural inclusion and diversity.

- Projects such as Songs from Direct Provision in South County Dublin, amongst others, provided creative opportunities for people living in Direct Provision.
- The project Crown – Hair & Identity in Traveller Culture with Mayo County Council is an example from a number of projects that supported Traveller and Roma inclusion.
- Le Chéile – the Open Youth Orchestra of Ireland – and the first open national youth orchestra in the world – is a cross-border ensemble made up exclusively of musicians with disabilities which was developed by the Royal Irish Academy of Music with Creative Ireland funding.
- The Programme also works with partners to ensure that LGBTI+ adults and young people are visible, valued and included. This year saw a Virtual LGBT+ Awareness & Inclusion Youth Festival supported as part of Cruinniú na nÓg.

6. Transport update

Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan

- One of the priorities of the Minister for Transport for public transport is the rollout of the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan to benefit people living in rural areas.
- Starting this year, this plan is a major national public transport initiative funded by the Department of Transport and managed by the NTA.
- It aims to increase public transport connectivity over a five-year period, particularly for people living outside the cities and towns.
- The overarching aim of Connecting Ireland is to develop an accessible, integrated and sustainable network of public transport offerings across Ireland.
- Nationally, Connecting Ireland proposes to expand the public transport network in rural areas and to increase service levels. As a result:
 - the Plan will see a 25% overall increase in rural bus services
 - 70% of people in rural Ireland will have access to public transport service that provides at least three return trips daily to the nearby town. (This compares to the current figure of 53%)
 - Over 100 rural villages will benefit from frequent public transport service (at least three return trips daily) for the first time
 - There will be over 60 new connections to regional cities from surrounding areas.

- The proposed improvements will not only be focussed on enhancing the regular “timetabled” services. Demand-based “door-to-door” services will still be at the core of rural transport along with other innovative transport services
- The Minister believes that Connecting Ireland will greatly improve the mobility options for many currently unable to avail of public transport services.

Young Adult Card

- In view of the importance of incentivising young people to use public transport, €25m was secured in Budget 2022 for the purpose of introducing a young adult card for travel on PSO funded public transport services.
- The introduction of a young adult card (YAC) allows any person nationwide who is between 19 and 23 years old, to avail of an entitlement for discounted travel costs, and to increase the level of discount over and above the current student discount to an average of discount of 50% across all services, including city, intercity and rural services. Mature students in full time education are also included in the scheme as are eligible visitors to Ireland within the ‘young adult’ age cohort.
- The YAC was launched on PSO services on the 9th of May, with over 1000 applications received by the NTA on launch day alone. The initiative will be broadened to include commercial operators later this year, with the aim to have it in place before the recommencement of third level colleges. This will not only promote modal shift in the transport sector among this age group but should also contribute towards a reduced reliance on private transport with associated benefit of transport emission savings.
- The identified benefits of the young adult card are:
 - Increased uptake of public transport by making it more attractive to young people and reduce their tendency to use car as their default mode;
 - Reduce road accidents through increased use of safer modes; accident rates amongst younger people are much higher than average;
 - A simplified and more cost-effective card issuing process;
 - A fare discounting scheme that is more equitable; and
 - Effective use of PSO funds to encourage modal shift to public transport.

7. Broadband Connection Points (BCP) and Connected Communities

- There are approximately 268 BCPs which are live and operational on the Connected Communities website.
- The overall aim of the BCP initiative is **to connect 300** publicly accessible buildings in rural areas, typically community centres like this one, **to high-speed broadband**.
- **The Connected Communities website** provides the location of your closest Internet-enabled community space. While all BCPs will act as community hubs with WiFi access, each individual BCP will have their own character and focus on specific challenges facing their community.

Connected Hubs

- *Our Rural Future* the governments five year rural development policy recognises the opportunity for rural regeneration that remote working presents.

- One of the key actions which the policy commits to is establishing a comprehensive and integrated network of 400 **remote working hubs** over the lifetime of the policy to 2025.
- The Connected Hubs platform, **connectedhubs.ie** was launched in May 2021 and to date 232 hubs (including 24 BCPs) have onboarded onto the platform, with this figure increasing on an ongoing basis.
- The platform provides users with information on the location of, and facilities available at **remote working hubs throughout Ireland.**
- Connectedhubs.ie is a single network that gives people the option to work within their own communities – regardless of where their employer is headquartered.
- ConnectedHubs.ie will link over 400 hubs nationally and is a key part of plans to make remote working a reality for thousands of people across the country.
- By giving people that choice to work from within their own communities, we can attract people back to rural Ireland and revitalise the centres of our towns and villages; we can reduce commuting times, lower transport emissions and, most importantly, improve the quality of life for rural dwellers.

Future Direction

A significant number of Connected Hubs initiatives will be developed during 2022 including:

- the development of a **National Hub Strategy for Ireland’s National Hub Network**
- the continued development of the National Hub Network dataset which will (*inter alia*) - help inform future decision making
- the ongoing engagement with potential corporate clients with a view to building a revenue stream for the Connectedhubs platform contributing to its sustainability
- research work to help identify the benefits *Connected Hubs* delivers for local communities and the wider economy including the potential climate-related benefits of the National Hub Network

Similarly, a BCP strategy will be drafted in 2022 which will include ambitions around peer support & development/capacity building activities (both at a network level and in terms of individual BCP/community requirements)

8. Town Centre First Policy

Our Rural Future, the Government’s five year policy for rural Ireland, outlines a vision to support the regeneration and development of rural towns and villages across Ireland to contribute to local and national economic recovery, and to enable people to live and work in a vibrant environment.

The Town Centre First policy, is a key element of this and represents a new approach to the development of our towns where local communities and local businesses can be central to reimagining their own towns and planning their own futures.

Key to this is the establishment of the National Implementation Office to assist in the delivery and implementation of the policy, and to co-ordinate stakeholder engagement at a national level. This office will be responsible for supporting Town Regeneration Officers

(TRO) in driving implementation of the policy and will also produce an Annual Implementation Plan.

DRCD has agreed the structure and funding for the National Office and the TROs with local authorities. The first step is the appointment of the head of the National Implementation Office. The recruitment process has concluded and the successful candidate will commence in this pivotal role shortly.

Similarly, local authorities have now also been authorised to commence the recruitment of TROs who will drive the development of TCF Plans at local level across the country.

TROs will be crucial to managing the implementation of the policy at a local level and ensuring the development and implementation of TCF plans. The role of the Town Regeneration Officers is outlined in the policy, but one of their challenges will be to ensure that Town Teams are representative of the whole town and include stakeholders from a wide variety of ages, interests and communities to come together and shape their town's future.

Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Unit

12 July 2022