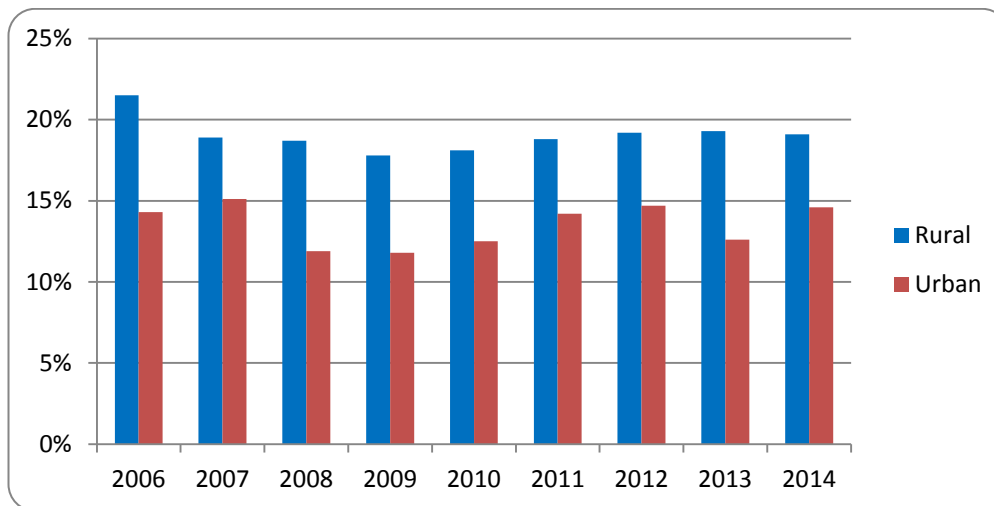


Policy Objective : To secure the existence of substantial numbers of viable communities in all parts of rural Ireland where every person would have access to meaningful work, adequate income and to social services

Poverty in rural Ireland

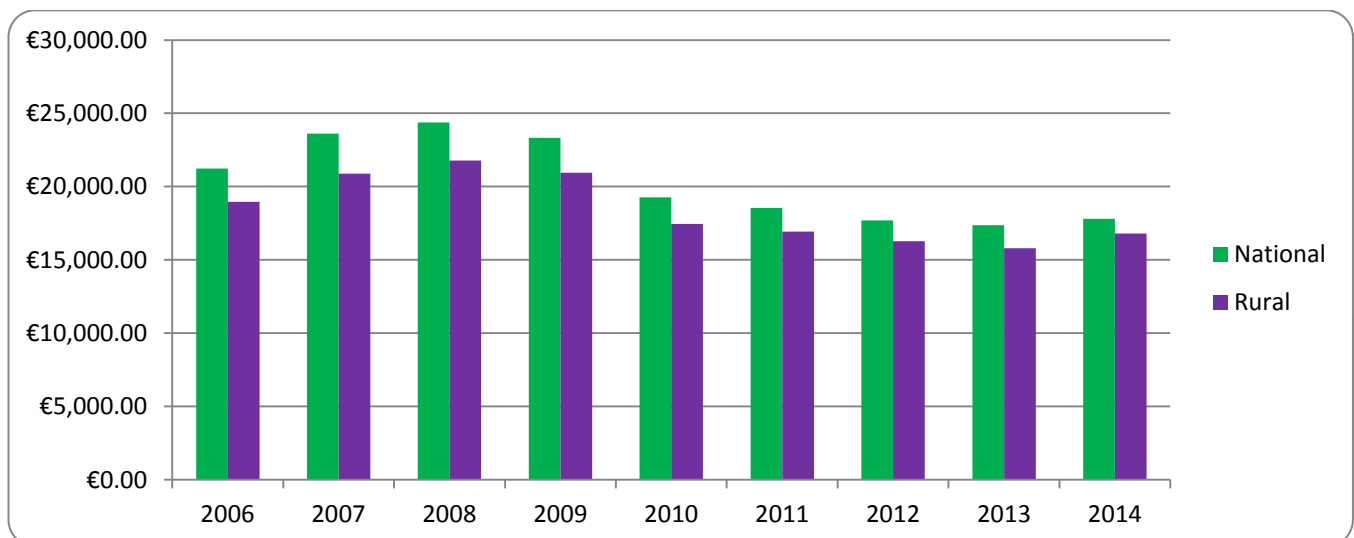
An unequal and two tier recovery is emerging in Ireland. Poverty rates at all levels are higher in rural areas and the median income is lower in rural Ireland. In Charts 1 and 2 we detail these trends over time. Even within rural Ireland there are significant variations within the regions, with some faring better than others. Solutions to persistently low rural incomes and falling farm incomes require broader strategies, both for farm and non-farm families. This will require policy planning, both economic and social supports and broader skills development strategies.

Chart 1: 'At Risk of Poverty' Rates, Urban and Rural 2006-2014



Source: CSO SILC Various

Chart 2: Median Equivalised Disposable Income¹ (Individual) 2006-2014



Source: CSO SILC Various

¹ Median income for an individual after tax and welfare transfers

Employment

The economic recession, restructuring of agriculture and subsequent decline in off-farm employment has led to a narrowing of the economic base in rural areas. Low-paid, part-time and seasonal work, combined with unemployment and an ageing demographic are significant factors in rural poverty and social exclusion.

- Since Q3 2008 full time employment in the Border, Midlands and Western region has fallen by 8.7% and by 6.6% in the Southern and Eastern Region.
- Emigration from rural Ireland is still disproportionately higher than the norm with at least one household in four in the most rural areas directly affected by the emigration of at least one member since 2006².
- Whilst there has been a welcome increase in employment over the past two years, this has been predominantly urban based.

Access to sustainable, well paid employment, access to public transport and public services (such as schools, primary care centres, training opportunities) are essential to ensuring young people can remain and settle in vibrant rural communities.

Broadband

Lack of quality broadband in rural areas is a considerable barrier to the diversification and growth of the rural economy in Ireland. The CEDRA Report ³ noted the strategic role of broadband and one of its key recommendations was a call on Government to ensure the delivery of 30Mbps to all rural areas by the end of 2015. This recommendation has not been achieved.

The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources has set 2020 as the deadline to provide universal broadband coverage nationally. Given the present lack of investment it is possible that this deadline will not be met. In the intervening

² Glynn, I, Kelly, T. and MacÉinrí, P (2013) *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*. UCC

³ http://www.agresearch.teagasc.ie/rerc/CEDRA/CEDRA_Report.pdf

four year period rural areas and rural businesses will continue to be disadvantaged by poor broadband infrastructure.

Access to public services

Cumulative cuts to public services and the impact of changing demographics have had a negative impact on the lives of those living in rural areas. An older population will require greater access to health and care services. Public services in rural areas should be delivered according to the equivalence principle – this means that services in rural areas should be of equivalent quality to those in urban areas.

Five things Government can do

1. Use windfall gains to frontload significant broadband investment in rural areas to support rural entrepreneurs, businesses, and employment creation.
2. Publish and implement a comprehensive National Spatial Strategy.
3. Ensure the delivery of infrastructure and public services in rural areas is in accordance with the equivalence principle.
4. Invest in accessible public transport and deliver an integrated transport network across the country to ensure rural dwellers can access public services, employment and training opportunities.
5. Develop an ambitious and long-term rural and regional economic and social development policy to ensure that employment created is sustainable and provides a minimum essential standard of living and that rural areas have the public services and infrastructure needed to adapt to changing demographics in the long term