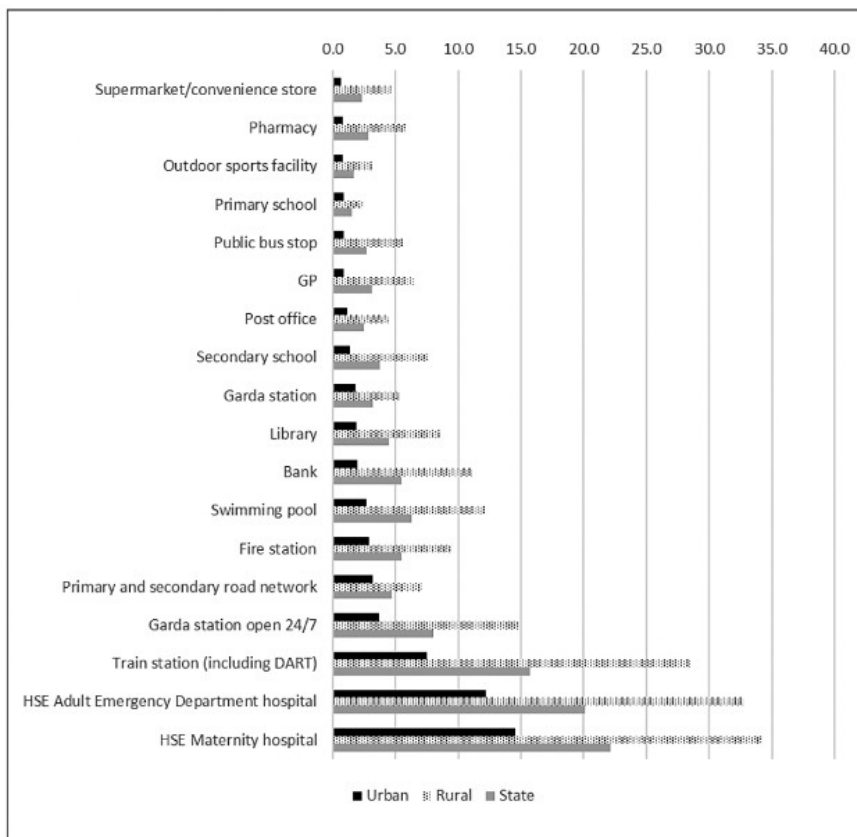


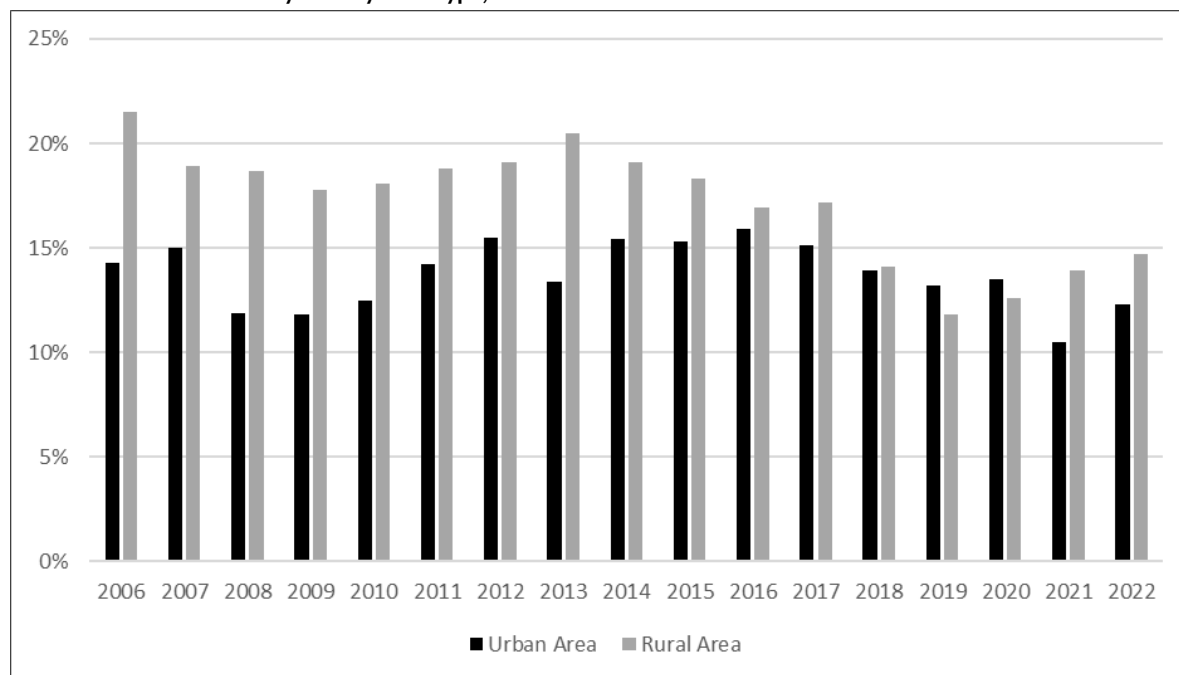
Rural Development

Chart 4.1: Average distance (km) of residential dwellings to everyday services, by State, urban and rural area



Source: CSO, PxStat 2023

Chart 4.2: At Risk of Poverty Rate by Area Type, 2004-2020



Source: CSO, PxStat 2023

Rural Development

Just over three in ten people in Ireland (31.4 per cent) live in a rural area, above the European average.¹ Countryside areas and settlements of less than 1,500 people are characterised by a lower proportion of young adults, and a higher proportion of older people compared with areas with populations over 50,000. This combination of outmigration of young adults for Third Level education and/or work and an ageing population poses a significant challenge for the delivery of services and the sustainability of rural economies. Reports from the CSO show that the average distance to most everyday services for rural dwellings was at least three times longer than for urban dwellings. For supermarkets/convenience stores, GPs and pharmacies, the average travel distance was seven times longer for rural dwellings (Chart 4.1). Cost can also be a particular barrier to services, particularly for childcare. While these costs have seen some reduction through Government's National Childcare Scheme, it still negatively impacts family finances, with mothers exiting paid employment due to the absence of affordable childcare providers.² The provision of childcare spaces, and the ratio of staff to children in childcare must also receive attention and investment in the coming years to facilitate parents' participation in employment and education, particularly in rural areas.

Rural Poverty

Supporting rural households to ensure that they have sufficient incomes will be crucial to the future of rural Ireland. This requires both social and economic supports, and broader skills and

economic development strategies. Low-paid, part-time and seasonal work and long-term underemployment are significant factors in rural poverty and exclusion.

Looking at incomes on a county and regional level in 2020, the Midland region and the Border region had the lowest disposable income per person, with persons in the Border, West and Midlands regions consistently reporting a disposable income below the state average since 2004 (Chart 4.2).

The amount of money required to achieve the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) ranges from an estimated amount of €142 per week higher for rural couples with younger children (pre-school and primary age), to €197 per week for rural couples with children of primary and second-level school age, than for their urban counterparts according to the latest MESL figures from the Vincentian MESL Research Centre.³ Higher costs in 2022 related to household energy, transport and fuel (as was the case in 2020 and 2021), however these costs increased significantly between 2021 and 2022.

Policy Priorities

- Invest in an integrated, accessible and flexible rural transport network.
- Ensure that development initiatives resource areas which are further from the major urban areas.
- Deliver public services according to the equivalence principle.
- Improve and expand public services in remote and rural areas.

¹ Central Statistics Office (2019) Urban and Rural Life in Ireland 2019. Dublin: Stationery Office

² ESRI (2023). 'Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland and Northern Ireland.' Economic and Social Research Institute

³ https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2023_annual_update.pdf