



Who we are & What we do

RDC was established in 1991 and is an independent organisation working to ensure the collective needs and opportunities of rural areas can be realised. RDC works to promote positive and sustainable change helping to develop and regenerate rural areas for the better. We work with and support the community, voluntary, private and public sector through a range of economic, social, cultural and environmental projects and programmes.

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What is Rural?

Introduction

There is now a greater emphasis on policy to be evidence based. For the rural domain this brings the need for a clear and robust way of defining what we mean by 'rural'. This leaflet considers the definition for rural Northern Ireland and provides a snapshot picture of rural life drawing upon information collated from official government publications.

The Rural And Urban Definition: Northern Ireland

In an attempt to address the need to define urban and rural, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) published a Report by the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group in 2005, which considered this question, of what we mean by 'Rural', in depth.

It is recognised that a range of different definitions have been used. The 2005 Report identified an eight band categorisation of settlements which runs from Band A (Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area) to Band H (Small Village, Hamlet and Open Countryside) based on population size coupled with the provision of services (See Table 1).

This statistical classification allows users, both within government and beyond, to group specific categories of settlements for particular policy purposes. For certain purposes it may be useful to group particular categories of settlements as urban, whereas for other purposes a different grouping may be appropriate. The classification allows for such flexibility. However, in the absence of a particular policy focus, the report recognises the value of a general definition of the terms urban and rural. It identifies that for such general purposes all settlements included in the categories A to E (Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area through to Small Towns) are given the classification of urban, while Bands F to H (all settlements with a population less than 4,500 or open countryside) are given a classification rural.

The NI Rural Development Programme, for example, uses this general definition to define 'rural'.

Table 1: Settlement Classifications

	Band	Settlement Type	Population Size
Urban	A	Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA)	c580,000
	B	Derry Urban Area (DUA)	c90,000
	C	Large Town	>= 18,000 and <75,000
	D	Medium Town	>= 10,000 and <18,000
	E	Small Town	>= 4,500 and < 10,000
Rural	F	Intermediate Settlement	>= 2,250 and < 4,500
	G	Village	>= 1,000 and < 2,250
	H	Small Village & Open Countryside	< 1,000 and open countryside



Snapshot of Rural Living

Demography

Base

- In 2001, 35% of the Northern Ireland population lived in rural areas.
- In 2001, the split of the rural population was as follows: less than 16 - 24.5%; 16 to 59 - 63.1%; 60 plus - 12.4%.
- In 2007/08, the average rural household size was 2.7 persons. This figure is the same as that reported for the 2002/03 period.
- In 2007/08, 29% of rural households have 1 or more adults over pension age. This is down 2% from the 2002/03 figure. In comparison, urban households with 1 or more adults over pension age have grown from 22% in 2002/03 to 29% in 2007/08.
- In 2007/08, 50% of rural households affiliate themselves to be from a catholic background while 41% are protestant. This has shown a shift from the 2002/03 period where protestant accounted for 53% and catholic 37%.

Change

- For the period 2001 to 2008, the net change in Northern Ireland's population was 86,000. Of that total, 61,000 occurred in rural areas with urban areas increasing by just 25,000.
- For the period 2001 to 2008, the population in rural areas grew by 10.1% compared to 2.4% in urban areas.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, Belfast saw a 3.2% decline in population while areas along the M1 and A1 corridors saw a distinct increase.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, populations in Intermediate Settlements (2,250 - 4,500) grew by 10.8% and villages (1,000 to 2,250) grew by 13.1%.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, the population of villages and hamlets on the outskirts of Belfast grew by the largest percentages (23.3% and 12.3%) when analysed against all those settlements across Northern Ireland.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, internal migration (movements within NI) showed a distinct urban to rural flow. Urban areas saw a decline of 22.8% while rural areas saw a growth of 42.2% over the same period.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, rural areas gained slightly from external migration (movement into and out of NI) although the greatest impact was recorded in urban areas. Rural areas saw a growth of 14.1% while urban areas reported a growth of 21.6% over the same period.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, the number of children (those under 16) in rural areas grew by approximately 2.5%. In comparison over the same period, the number of children in urban areas declined by approximately 7.5%.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, the number of people in the younger working class bracket (16-39) in rural areas grew by approximately 6%. In comparison over the same period, the number of people in the younger working class bracket in urban areas saw a decline of approximately 0.5%.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, the number of people in the older working class bracket (40 to 59/64) in rural areas grew by approximately 19%. In comparison over the same period, the number of people in the older working class bracket in urban areas grew by approximately 10%.
- Over the period 2001 to 2008, the number of those of pension age in rural areas grew by approximately 20.5%. In comparison over the same period, the number of those of pension age in urban areas grew by 9.5%.

Economics

- In 2007/08, 5% of rural households do not have a bank account. This has reduced from the figure of 14% reported for the 2002/03 period.
- In 2007/08, 57% of rural households have either no savings or savings of less than £1,500. This is similar to the trend reported in 2002/03.
- The percentage of males from rural areas in full-time employment rose from 61% in 2002/03 to 65% in 2007/08.
- The percentage of males from rural areas classed as self-employed has dropped from 20% in 2002/03 to 17% in 2007/08.
- The percentage of females from rural areas in full-time employment rose from 34% in 2002/03 to 37% in 2007/08.
- The percentage of females from rural areas looking after a family or home has declined by 2% from 11% in 2002/03 to 9% in 2007/08.
- In 2007/08, 6% of rural households indicated they were behind in paying 1 or more household bills.
- In 2007/08, the net weekly income of rural households was £495. In comparison, the net weekly income in urban households was £405 and for Northern Ireland as a whole (£465).
- The net weekly rural household income has risen from £396 in 2002/03 to £495 in 2007/08.

Agriculture

- Of the total Northern Ireland land area of 1.36 million hectares, approximately 75% is in agricultural use.
- The number of farms has fallen from 31,132 in 1999 to 24,471 in 2010 - a decrease of 21%.
- The average farm business income in 2009/10 was £21,586 - down £4,077 from 2008/09.
- In 2010, 46,900 people were employed in agriculture, down 21% from 1999 (59,251).
- Of the Northern Ireland workforce, 4.2% (30,267) are farmers.
- Agriculture contributed 2.1% (£590 million) of Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2007. This compares to 0.8% of GVA for the UK as a whole.

Education

- The number of primary schools located in rural areas dropped by 5.2% over the period 2004/05 to 2009/10. In comparison, the number of schools in urban areas declined by 4.8% over the same period.
- The number of post primary schools located in rural areas dropped by 8% over the period 2004/05 to 2009/10. In comparison, the number of post primary schools in urban areas declined by 6%.
- The number of pupils attending a rural primary school increased from 58,893 in 2004/05 to 59,408 in 2009/10 (an increase of 0.9%). In comparison, the number of pupils attending an urban primary school over the same period decreased from 113,105 to 104,363 (a decrease of 7.7%).
- The number of pupils attending a rural post primary school increased from 20,995 in 2004/05 to 21,970 in 2009/10 (an increase of 4.6%). In comparison, the number of pupils attending an urban post primary school over the same period decreased from 132,454 to 125,789 (a decrease of 5%).

Crime

- During the period 2009/10, 45.8% of all crimes recorded by the PSNI were from rural areas. This is a decrease of 0.4% from the 2008/09 period.
- Of all offences recorded for rural Northern Ireland, burglary was the only one showing an increase. These rose by 1.6% to 5314 from the 2008/09 period to the 2009/10 period.
- During the period 2009/10, 44% of all antisocial behaviour incidents were recorded as rural. This is a 10.7% decrease on the 2008/09 period.
- During 2009, 80.8% of all fatal road traffic collisions occurred in rural areas. This is a 38% increase from the 2008 figure of 58.

Health

- In 2009, health outcomes in rural areas tended to be much better than in Northern Ireland as a whole. Drug related mortality was 49% lower, admissions to hospital for self-harm was 45% lower and alcohol related mortality was 45% lower.
- In 2009, life expectancy in rural areas was 1.3 years and 0.6 years higher for males and females respectively than in Northern Ireland generally.
- In 2009, the average ambulance response time at 12.9 minutes in rural areas was almost double the regional average.

The information contained in this leaflet has been collated using official government publications. Please note different definitions of rural have been used, dependent on definitions used by the relevant government departments.

Communications

Broadband

- In 2010, 11% of homes in rural areas have access to an unbundled exchange compared to 90% in urban areas.
- In 2010, 36% of people from rural areas use the internet to access online banking services, the same as the percentage for urban areas. These figures are lower than the UK average of 43%.
- In 2010, 17% of people from rural areas are very satisfied with their broadband connection compared to 31% in urban areas.

Mobile Phones

- In 2010, 90% of people in rural areas have a mobile phone compared to 87% in urban areas.
- In 2010, 66% of people in rural areas are satisfied with their mobile phone reception compared to 88% in urban areas. This is a drop of some 10% for rural areas from 2009.

Other

- In 2010, 51% of households in rural areas have satellite TV compared to 40% in urban areas. In contrast, 1% of households in rural areas have cable TV compared to 17% in urban areas.
- In 2010, 52% of households in rural areas access only free TV compared to 42% in urban areas.
- In 2010, 59% of households in rural areas have a leading games console (PS3, Wii & Xbox360) compared to 49% of urban households.
- In 2010, 42% of households in rural areas have a leading handheld portable console (Nintendo DSi, Sony PSP) compared to 34% of urban households.

Housing

- In 2009, 231,480 properties (31.3%) were located in rural areas.
- In 2009, 72.4% of rural properties were owner occupied. This compares to 57.9% in urban areas.
- In 2009, 3.6% of all households in rural areas had an annual household income of less than £4,999. This compares to 2.4% in urban areas.
- In 2009, 4.1% of dwellings in rural areas were classed as unfit. This compares to only 1.6% for urban areas.
- In 2009, the average cost of urgent housing repairs in rural areas was £1,406.85. This compares to £460.22 for urban areas.
- In 2009, 34% of all dwellings failing to meet the Decent Homes Standard were located in rural areas. This is in comparison to 66% for urban areas.
- In 2009, of those households living in rural areas, 45.8% were said to be in fuel poverty. This compares to 42.8% in urban areas.
- In 2009, under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), 23.5% of properties in rural areas presented category 1 hazards. This compares to 17.7% for urban areas and 19.5% for Northern Ireland as a whole.
- In 2009, 1.2% of all rural households had no central heating. This compares to 0.9% of urban households.
- In 2010, approximately 15% of all Housing Executive properties are in rural areas.
- In March 2010, there were 5,311 households on the Housing Waiting List seeking homes in rural areas.
- During 2009/10, there were 185 new build starts in rural areas. This represents 10.1% of the total social new build programme.
- During 2009/10, 6,443 'Warm Homes' installations were undertaken, of which 2,556 (almost 40%) were in rural areas.
- During 2009/10, 8,719 planning applications were received for rural areas. This is an increase of 27.5% over the period 2008/09. In comparison, urban areas received 5,832 applications, down 19.2% from 2008/09.

Travel

- In 2009, of the 25,167 km of public roads in Northern Ireland, 79% were classified as rural with the remaining 21% as urban.
- In 2001, 46% of rural dwellers worked in urban areas. 35% of these people worked within the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area.