

Rural Poverty

For Older People In Ireland and
Developing Countries



AgeAction

For all older people



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection



www.welfare.ie

This booklet is produced to raise awareness about the experience of older people living in rural Ireland and in rural areas in developing countries. The publication has been funded by the Department of Social Protection under the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 17th October 2015 Public Awareness Initiative. The views expressed in this booklet are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Social Protection.

1: INTRODUCTION

Age Action was established in 1992 as the voice for older people and the leading advocacy organisation on ageing issues. We act both as a network of organisations and individuals, including older people and carers of older people, and a service provider, assisting thousands of older people every year.

Our mission is to empower all older people to live full lives as actively engaged citizens and to secure their rights to comprehensive high quality services according to their changing needs.

While our commitment is to all older people, we have a particular responsibility to ensure that the needs of the most disadvantaged older people are given high priority. Through our Ageing and Development programme we raise awareness about global ageing and the issues that face older people in developing countries.

This booklet will look at the reality for older people in rural communities, both in Ireland and in developing countries. Though very different contexts, there are often shared experiences of poverty and social exclusion.

This booklet provides information on:

- Older people in a rural context
- Access to an adequate standard of living
- Access to services

Developing countries are also often called the Global South and low income countries

2: RURAL CONTEXT

Older People in Ireland

According to Census 2011ⁱ, there were 535,393 people over the age of 65 years living in Ireland – accounting for just over 11 per cent of the total population. Of this number, 227,413 (42 per cent) older people were living in what the Census describes as rural areas and small townsⁱⁱ. The proportion of the rural population who are over the age of 65 years is slightly higher than in the State as a whole at 13 per cent.

“The term Aggregate Town Area refers to towns (including environs of legal towns) with a total population of 1,500 or more. The term Aggregate Rural Area refers to the population outside Aggregate Town areas and includes the population of towns with a population of less than 1,500 persons” (Census 2011).

We know from older people that austerity has had a profound effect on their lives. Older people dependent solely on the State pension and the Household Benefits Package have seen their weekly incomes cut by more than €13 since 2009.

Fewer people can get health and social care as budgets are slashed and access to supports is made more difficult. For those living in rural areas the closure of vital services, like post offices and Garda stations, has worsened their experience of austerity.

Case Study One - A changing sense of community

Older people that we spoke with in rural Ireland have emphasised the loss of a sense of community where they live. They spoke about the impact that the emigration of younger generations has had on the community and how changing attitudes has led to a fragmentation of relationships between one other.

‘Long ago the community itself took care of each other ... now you don’t know your neighbour’.

‘A lot older people grew up in a community, but the community is dying. We have to form our own community and look after each other’.

‘People don’t know each other anymore’.

Older people in developing countries

Population ageing in rural communities is happening all across the developing world. There has been an increase in the proportion of older people and a drop in the proportion of younger people living in rural areas in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin Americaⁱⁱⁱ. In Asia, for example, from 1990-2015 there was an increase of 2.2 per cent in the proportion of people over 65 living in rural areas. The proportion of children fell by 9.6 per cent.^{iv}

Sub Saharan Africa is, geographically, the area of the continent of Africa that lies south of the Sahara Desert.

The data also shows that population ageing in rural communities is happening faster in developing countries than in more developed regions. The trend is visible within individual countries as older people are more likely to live in rural area than in the larger towns and cities. Compared to urban areas, rural areas also remain disproportionately home to older people in the majority of countries.

The main reason for this is that many young people are moving to the cities for work, leaving older people behind. But this is not the whole story. Other causes include falling fertility rates and the continuing effects of HIV and Aids.^v The situation can be made worse by local conditions such as an outbreak of conflict or a natural disaster. Other context specific social and economic factors within a country or region will also feed into it.

As rural communities in many developing countries change the reality for older people in these communities is also changing. Many rural communities have been hollowed out, leaving them predominately populated by older people and children. Older people will often be the primary caregivers for their grandchildren^{vi}, sometimes because children are left behind when their parents migrate and sometimes due to parents dying from HIV/Aids.

Case Study Two - Donghao village, in Hebei Province, northern China

The village has a population of around 2,500. Most households only have small areas of land where they grow vegetables, wheat and maize for their families. Some also keep pigs, chickens and rabbits.

Most young male villagers and unmarried women – up to 50 per cent of the population – have left to find work, leaving mainly older people, women and children. There is only one primary school and the health clinics only provide basic care. The poor condition of the roads makes accessing emergency healthcare difficult.

3: ACCESSING AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

Ireland

Older people can experience poverty and social exclusion because they rely on small fixed incomes that are vulnerable to increases in the cost of living or unexpected expenses such as medical care.

The Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), published by CSO, captures the extent of poverty in Ireland. The latest official poverty statistics^{vii} indicate that older people have a lower – ‘at risk’ of poverty, deprivation and consistent poverty rate than the population as a whole.

Part of the reason for this is their over-reliance on State transfers. This can lead to them being clustered around the poverty line with a ‘sharp cut-off’ placing many ‘above or below (the poverty line) on the basis of no more than a cent’ in the difference in their income^{viii}. Nonetheless, almost one in ten older people are ‘at risk’ of poverty while 16.1% experience deprivation and 1.9% experience consistent poverty.

Table 1 Older people’s experience of poverty 2013	
	People aged 65 years & over
“At risk” of poverty	9.2 per cent
Deprivation	16.1 per cent
Consistent Poverty	1.9 per cent

Source: CSO (2015) *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)* Dublin: CSO

In 2012, the CSO published an analysis the SILC figures over a number of years. Included in the analysis is a comparison of older people’s experience of the three poverty measures in urban and rural areas. The analysis found that older people in rural areas consistently had a higher ‘at risk’ of poverty rate than those living in urban areas. This divide was most pronounced in 2004 with 11.7 percentage points between the rate in urban versus rural areas. The gap narrowed considerable in 2009 to just 5.7 percentage points but widened again in 2010 to 9.3 percentage points.

Table 2 Older People's 'at risk' of poverty rate in urban versus rural areas – 2004;2009;2010

"At risk" of poverty	Urban %	Rural %
2004	21.5	33.2
2009	6.8	12.5
2010	5.4	14.7

Research undertaken by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) indicates that older people living in rural areas face higher costs than those living in urban areas. Much of the difference in expenditure for those living in rural areas relates to transport. For those living in rural areas access to a car is essential and this accounts for up to 82 per cent of the costs' difference^x. While older couples in rural areas face similar costs, the VPSJ research indicates that the supports they receive from the State enable them to attain a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL), which is not the case for lone pensioners.

"One fundamental difference in living in the country is transport, it can cost €50 each way to get to the hospital by taxi. The bus to the main town only goes once a week".

Table 3 Urban / Rural Expenditure comparison 2015

2015					
	Lone Pensioner		Pensioner Couple		
	NC	C	Both NC	C & NC	C & QA
Income					
Urban & Rural	€238.00	€249.30	€448.00	€459.30	€393.30

Expenditure					
Urban	€254.07	€255.77	€320.64	€322.34	€321.56
Rural	€313.07	€313.57	€384.51	€385.01	€383.34
Difference in rural costs	€59.00	€57.80	€63.87	€62.67	€61.78

Income Inadequacy					
Urban	(€16.07)	(€6.47)	€127.36	€136.96	€72.24
Rural	(€75.07)	(€64.27)	€63.49	€74.29	€10.46

Note: NC = Non-Contributory; C = Contributory; QA = Qualified Adult

Source: Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (2015) Minimum Essential Budgets for Ireland – Urban and Rural Budgets – available at <http://budgeting.ie/rural-budgets/r-income-scenarios/109-2015-income-scenarios> ; <http://budgeting.ie/urban-budgets/urban-income-scenarios>

Those living in a rural area not only have higher costs but often also have lower incomes. The CSO analysis shows that in 2004, 2009 and 2010 older people living in rural areas had much lower incomes than those living in urban areas.

Table 4 Rural / Urban Income comparison

	2004	2009	2010
Gross Income			
Urban	€321.11	€479.61	€463.98
Rural	€254.42	€376.89	€329.68
Difference in income	66.69	102.72	134.30
Source: CSO (2012) SILC: Thematic Report on the Elderly 2004,2009, 2010 Dublin: CSO			

Furthermore, the report notes, “those living in rural areas were more dependent on social transfers and less reliant on occupational pensions as a source of income than those living in urban areas” (CSO, 2012:5).

Developing countries

Poverty is a serious issue for older people in rural areas in developing countries. The majority of the world’s poorest people live in rural areas, even though overall rural poverty is falling. Of the 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty (defined as those living on less than US\$1.25/day), approximately 1 billion – around 70 per cent – lived in rural areas.*

Within individual countries the highest rates of rural poverty (though not necessarily the largest numbers of people) are often found in remote areas.^{xi}

A survey of older people in Peru found that more than half of the participants (56 per cent) said access to everyday essentials such as food, water, shelter, heating, fuel and clothing was a serious problem all of the time. A further 16 per cent reported such difficulties regularly and 12 per cent occasionally. However, the proportion of those reporting experiencing difficulties all of the time was higher among older people in rural areas.^{xii}

Case Study Three - A perspective from Peru

"[Out of the 45 families here] about 10 families are poor; they don't work the land. They cannot because they are too old or handicapped or the like. Yes, we do [consider ourselves poor], because we cannot supply our needs. When we have to go to Mendoza, or to the health post if we fall sick, we cannot get money because we haven't sold enough – it's complicated..." José del Carmen Portocarrero Santillán, male, 82 years of age, Peru.^{xiii}

Older people in rural areas rely on farming for their livelihoods particularly economically active older women.^{xiv} The proportion of older women working as farmers is higher than for younger women. Throughout Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America older women and men are more likely than other age groups to be working in agriculture.^{xv}

Case Study Four - An older woman's experience of agriculture in Senegal

"I may be an old woman but I have to plough with the kadiandou (traditional tilling instrument) and use the machete to clear bushes. I am left-handed and if you see me using the machete, you will not believe that I am a woman. I clear the rice field before it is ploughed and then I plant the rice... I have to get up before dawn and start cooking. Depending on what you cook, you may have to prepare that food the night before you go to bed. When you finish cooking in the morning you leave part of it at home for those who are staying there, and take the rest with you. At noon you stop for a while, you eat, and you resume work till the evening." Safiétou Goudiaby, female, 70 years of age, Senegal.^{xvi}

Given these figures it is important that governments support older farmers. Social policies, including adequate social protection, should also address the needs of older people living in poverty in rural areas given that traditional family support systems have been considerably weakened. This could include State pension provision. Only a quarter of older people globally have access to any type of pension so focusing on providing pension to older people in rural areas could be part of the solution.

4: ACCESS TO SERVICES

Ireland

A lack of access to services for those living in rural areas long predates the recession. A 2009 report found that those living in rural areas had greater difficulty accessing services such as banking, postal and GPs than their urban counterparts^{xvii}.

With the downturn in the economy, many of these services were withdrawn from rural areas. A recent newspaper article^{xviii} noted that 200 post offices have closed since 2007 while reports on bank closures are frequently published in the media^{xix}.

Case Study Five - Impact of the closure of post offices and agencies on rural communities^{xx}

In the west Galway village of Cleggan, the local post office closed in September 2015 after a change in the tenancy of the local shop in which it was located. The closure means that Cleggan's 260 residents must now travel 3 km to Claddaghduff to collect their social welfare payments.

A local resident explained that, "A couple of miles means a lot to the likes of people here....pensioners and others with disabilities will struggle to travel to Clifden and Claddaghduff to pick up their benefits". Furthermore, another local noted that "people...relied on the post office as a social outlet as much as anything else".

The closure of 100 Garda stations in 2013, the majority of which were in rural areas, has added to feelings of isolation among older people, many of whom took reassurances from the^{xxi} physical presence of a local station.

Furthermore, many older people use a pendant alarm to maintain a sense of security. This system is reliant on a landline telephone. As part of our consultation for our pre-Budget submission, older people living in rural Galway explained that their telephone lines are often down (particularly after bad weather), so there is no assurance that the alarm will work when it is needed.

"There is a level of fear building up amongst older people".

Earlier this year we conducted a survey amongst older people living in Galway city and county and their experience of accessing outpatient services. While the vast majority of respondents travelled to their appointment by car for those taking public transport the day was particularly difficult.

The closure of services in recent years has made transport an even more critical issue for older people forced to travel to neighbouring villages and towns to shop or to conduct their business.

The Government's rural transport scheme provides a vital lifeline for older people in rural areas. However, cutbacks to the scheme during the recession have caused much uncertainty and worry amongst older people.

Older people we met with in west Galway spoke about their fear of losing the bus that enables them to stay connected and to get to shops located in neighbouring towns.

Developing countries

Access to services is also a huge issue for older people living in rural areas in developing countries. The inaccessibility of many rural locations and poor infrastructure means there are few transport options. This is particularly difficult for older people with health problems who may live some distance from health facilities.

In a survey of older people in Mozambique 18 per cent of respondents said there was no health facility within half an hour of their home. This figure was higher among those living in rural areas.^{xxii}

A similar survey of older people in Kyrgyzstan found that 14 per cent of respondents had no health facility within half an hour of their home. A clear geographic divide emerges however, as the figure for those in urban area is 8 per cent, rising to 21 per cent for those in rural areas.^{xxiii}

A report on transport and mobility problems for older people in rural Tanzania highlights again the problems in accessing health services. Researchers looked at three villages in the Kilolo district. Only one village, Kidabaga, has a clinic. Another, Mwatasi, has a small dispensary. The third, Mhanga, has no health facilities at all. The report found that the ability of older people to get healthcare is severely restricted by poor transport services.

"I would rather stay home than endure the pains of having to walk all the way to Itonya. Alternatively, I resort to traditional herbs" (An older person in Mhanga)^{xxiv}

The report also looked at the frequency with which older people accessed health services. It found that only 21 per cent of older people in all three villages accessed health services in the last month and 45 per cent had accessed health services in the last 12 months. A quarter of older people had not accessed any health services for more than a year.^{xxv}

5: CONCLUSION

Living in a rural area has unique challenges for older people. This booklet shows that while there are differences in the context in which older people are living, in rural Ireland and in rural communities in developing countries, their experiences often leave them in similar situations. Many live in poverty and are unable to reach an adequate standard of living. Many are excluded from access to vital services which has a detrimental effect on their health and well being. Governments, service providers, including health service provider's, as well as older people themselves all need to work together to ensure there are better outcomes for older people living in rural Ireland and in rural areas in developing countries.

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An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí

Department of Social Protection

www.welfare.ie



AgeAction

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Age Action Ireland
30/31 Lower Camden Street
Dublin 2

Tel: +353 1 4756989

Email: info@ageaction.ie

Website: www.ageaction.ie