

# Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2021



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Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

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**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**

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## Key Findings

- Population growth in rural areas from 2001-20 has outstripped that in urban areas by a factor of almost 3 to 1 (20% to 7%)
- Young people from rural areas leave school with higher qualifications, and are more likely to enter higher education than their urban peers
- Rural people of working age are more likely to be in full-time employment (58%), and less likely to be economically inactive than those living in urban areas
- Average public sector earnings are substantially higher in urban areas, with a negligible difference between private sector earnings in rural compared with urban workplaces
- Workers from rural areas tend to be more highly skilled, and enjoy higher job satisfaction than urban workers (although this gap has narrowed)
- Workers from rural areas have an average commute of more than 50% longer than urban workers, travelling on average almost 600 miles more each year to get to work
- Rural workers (91%) are also much more likely to use their own transport to commute than those from urban areas (76%)
- More than half (58%) of NI businesses are in rural areas, yet rural businesses account for less than a quarter (20%) of employees and around a quarter (25%) of total business turnover
- Rural businesses predominantly engage in agriculture, forestry, fishing and construction, with urban businesses more widely spread across a variety of sectors
- Just 18% of all overnight tourism visits to NI, and only 12% of associated expenditure took place in rural locations
- Broadband availability and speeds in rural areas continues to improve, but still lag behind those available than in urban areas
- People living in rural areas are consistently more likely to rate their happiness and life satisfaction as high, and their health as good
- Life expectancy is notably higher in rural areas – but rural dwellers experience longer waiting times for emergency services than their urban counterparts, and waiting times are increasing
- People from rural areas are less likely to directly experience several crime types than those in urban areas
- The number of recorded crimes with a racist, sectarian or homophobic motivation increased in urban areas in 2019-20, with rural figures largely unchanged
- Similar proportions of urban and rural households are in relative or absolute poverty
- Rural pensioners are substantially more likely to experience relative or absolute poverty than their urban counterparts
- Levels of home ownership are higher in rural than in urban areas (80% to 65%), with house prices in rural areas higher on average than in towns and cities

# Northern Ireland Urban-Rural Statistics

● = Urban   ● = Mixed   ● = Rural

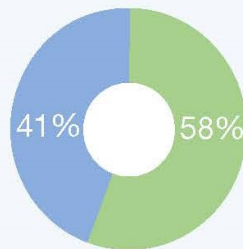
Population Growth, 2001-2020



Job Quality 2020



Businesses 2021



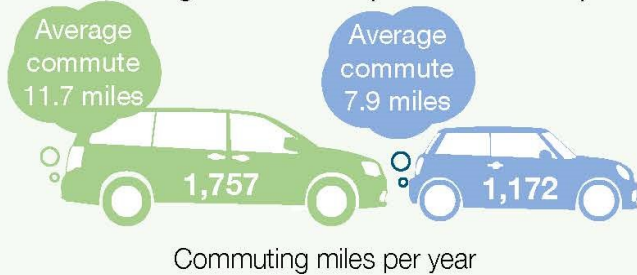
Tourism Expenditure 2019



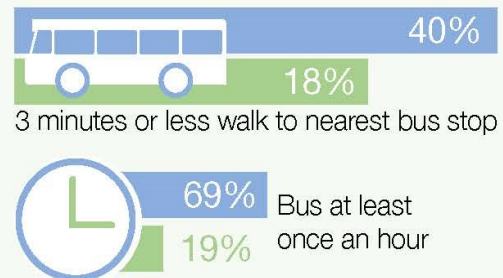
Median Annual Salary 2021



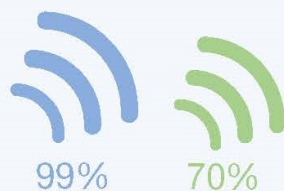
Average Commute (miles 2017-19)



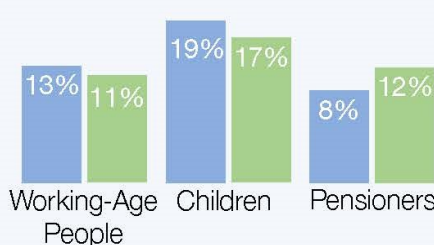
Public Transport 2017-19



Coverage of Superfast Broadband 2021



People in Absolute Poverty 2019/20



Wellbeing 2019-20



## **Introduction**

More than a third (36%) of Northern Ireland's (NI) population lives in a rural area. Despite similarities in many aspects of urban and rural life, there are also challenges which tend to be more pronounced in rural areas outside of Belfast.

The nature of rural industry and employment differs from that of towns and cities. Difficulties with access to services, and issues with connectivity, social and digital, tend to have a disproportionate impact on rural dwellers.

The cost of living also tends to be higher in rural areas, and rural households are more likely to experience fuel poverty. Despite the unique challenges presented by rural life, those living in rural areas on average enjoy a better self-reported quality of life than their urban counterparts, in terms of health, happiness and life satisfaction.

## **Key Rural Issues – Background and Aim**

A considerable amount of data is regularly collected across Government Departments, from both survey data and administrative sources. This publication will present relevant, already publicly available data from a unique urban/rural perspective, in order to highlight key urban/rural differences and disparities across a range of domains.

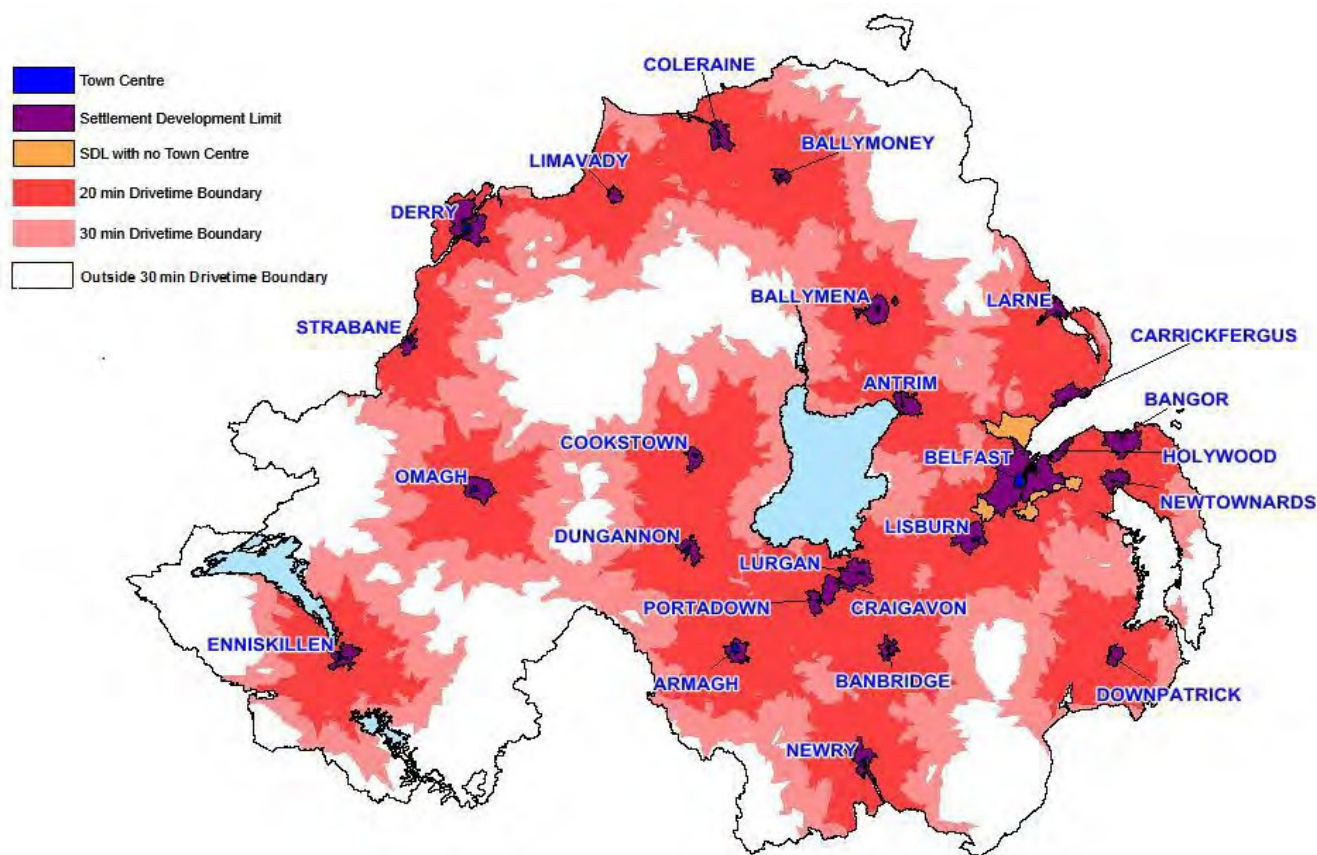
In doing so, the publication will provide a robust evidence base to inform the future direction of rural policy in NI, to underpin the Rural Needs Act (2016), and to support the equitable treatment of rural communities in policies and programmes across Government.

The domains explored in this publication, in terms of urban/rural comparison, include:

- Population
- Education
- Employment
- Industry
- Travel and Tourism
- Crime and Poverty
- Connectivity and access to services
- Health, Wellbeing and quality of life
- Household Income, Housing and Poverty

## Urban/Rural - Populations and Definition

Figure 1: NI Urban and Rural areas with 20 and 30 minute 'drive time' boundaries from settlements with a population of 10,000 or more



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Source: Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2015

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) carried out a review of settlement classification in 2015<sup>1</sup>, which recommended a default urban/rural boundary at a population level of 5,000.

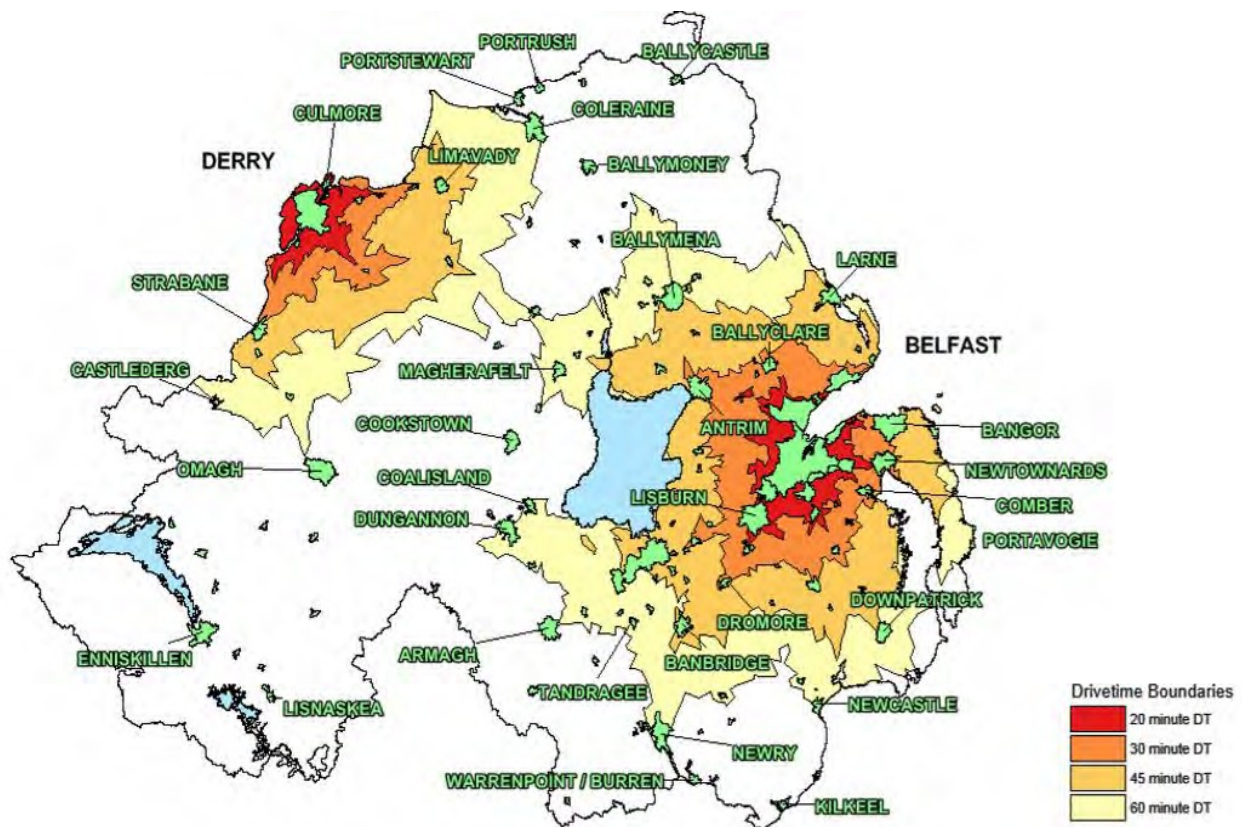
All settlements with a population of less than 5,000, and areas of open countryside, were defined as rural. The classification also incorporated measures of distance to settlements with a population of 10,000 or more. These measures were intended as proxies for accessibility, as previous research had indicated that towns of this size are large enough to

<sup>1</sup> Review of the statistical classification and delineation of Settlements, NISRA 2015  
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/review-statistical-classification-and-delineation-settlements>

provide access to all key services, and that rural areas in their vicinity are likely to thrive. Market towns are likely to have connections with city regions, and linkages between urban and rural areas are beneficial to both.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1 shows rural and urban areas of NI as defined by the review, as well as 20 and 30 minute drive time boundaries to urban settlements, above the 10,000 population threshold. In 2018, 41% of the rural population in NI live further than 20 minutes from a settlement of this size.

Figure 2: Drive-time boundaries to Belfast and Derry/Londonderry



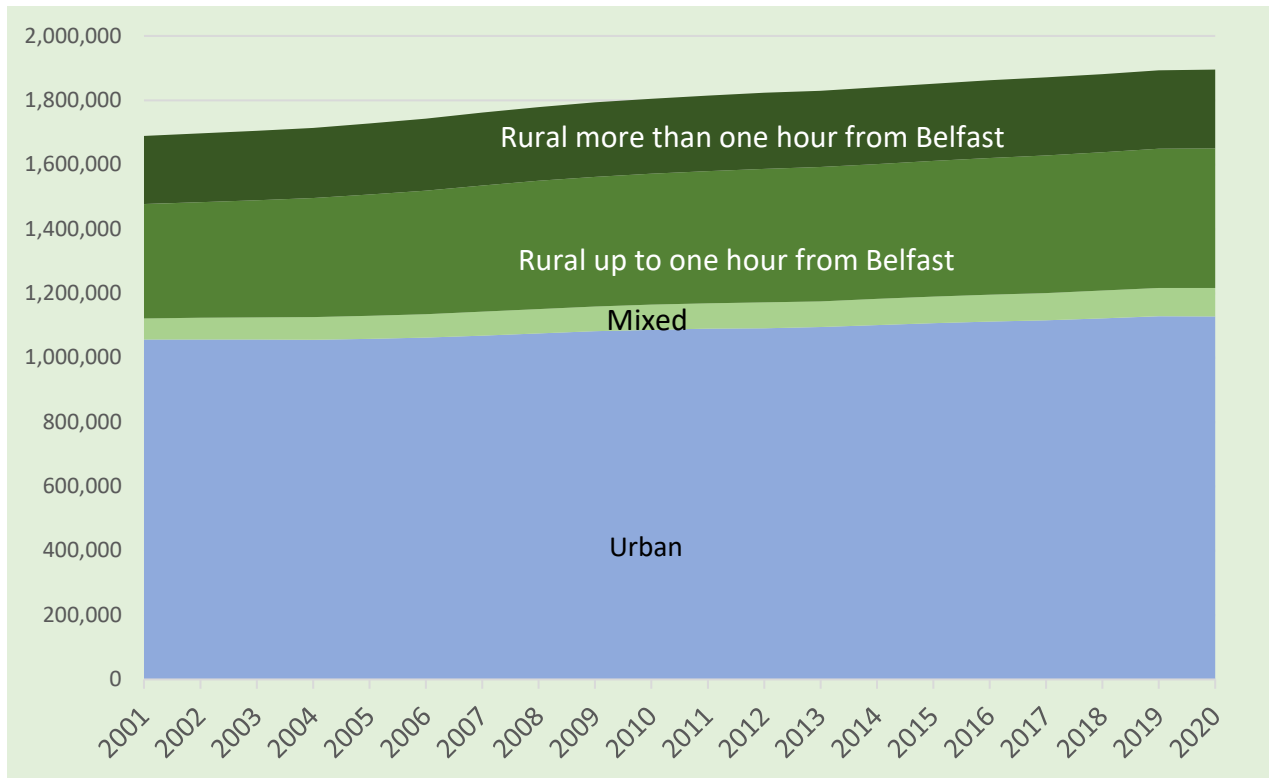
© Crown copyright and database rights NIMA MOU207.2 Source: Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2015 <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/review-of-the-statistical-classification-and-delineation-of-settlements-march-2015%20%281%29.pdf>

The 2015 settlement classification also incorporated specific drive times to Belfast and Londonderry, as the two major urban centres in NI (Figure 2). Belfast is regarded as the main regional economic driver, most important employment centre, and focus for

<sup>2</sup> Rural Policy and Evidence. A report prepared for the Rural Policy Division, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Sally Shortall, QUB, 2010

administration and commerce in NI<sup>3</sup>. More than a third (36%) of the rural population in NI live more than a 60 minute drive from Belfast.

Figure 3: Urban and Rural Population Growth, 2001-2020



Source: NISRA Mid-year Population Estimates 2020

<http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Theme.aspx?themeNumber=74&themeName=Population>

Under the 2015 settlement classification definition, more than 80% of the NI land mass is rural. Although more than a third of NI's population lives in a rural area, the rate of population growth in rural areas is higher than in urban areas.

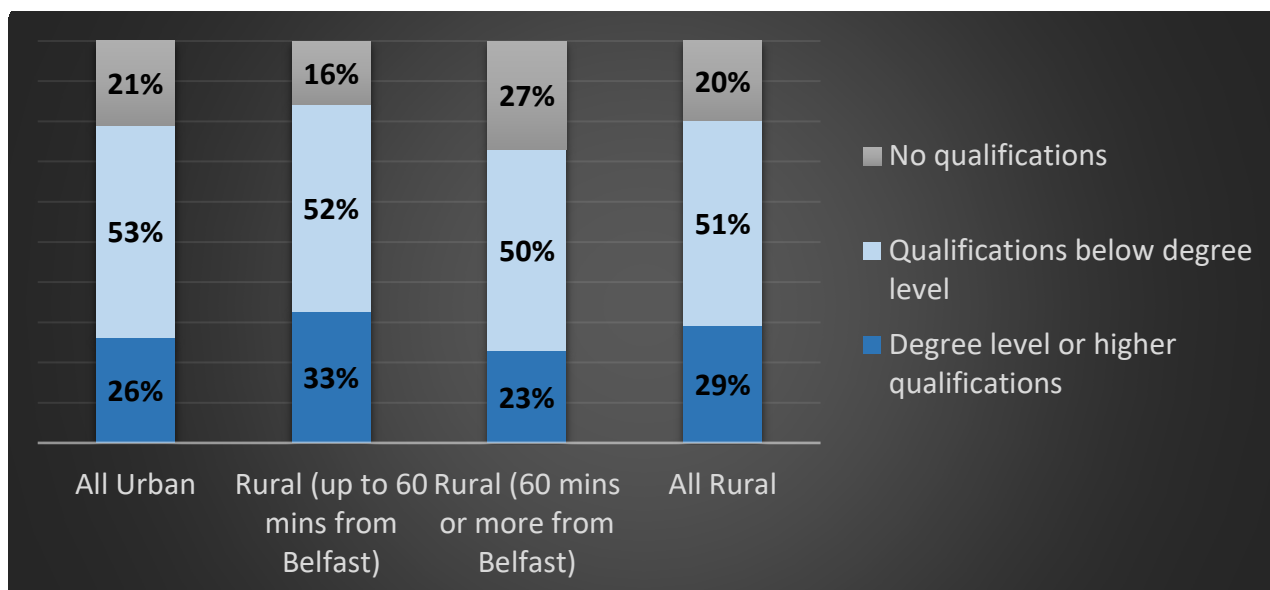
Between 2001 and 2020, the population of rural areas rose by 20%, compared to an increase of just 7% for urban areas. As a result, the rural share of the overall NI population grew from 34% to 36%. Areas with fastest growth were those close to urban centres, either in mixed rural/urban areas (36%) or less than an hour's commute from Belfast (22%).

<sup>3</sup> Regional Development Strategy 2035, Department for Regional Development 2010 <https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/rds2035.pdf>



## Education

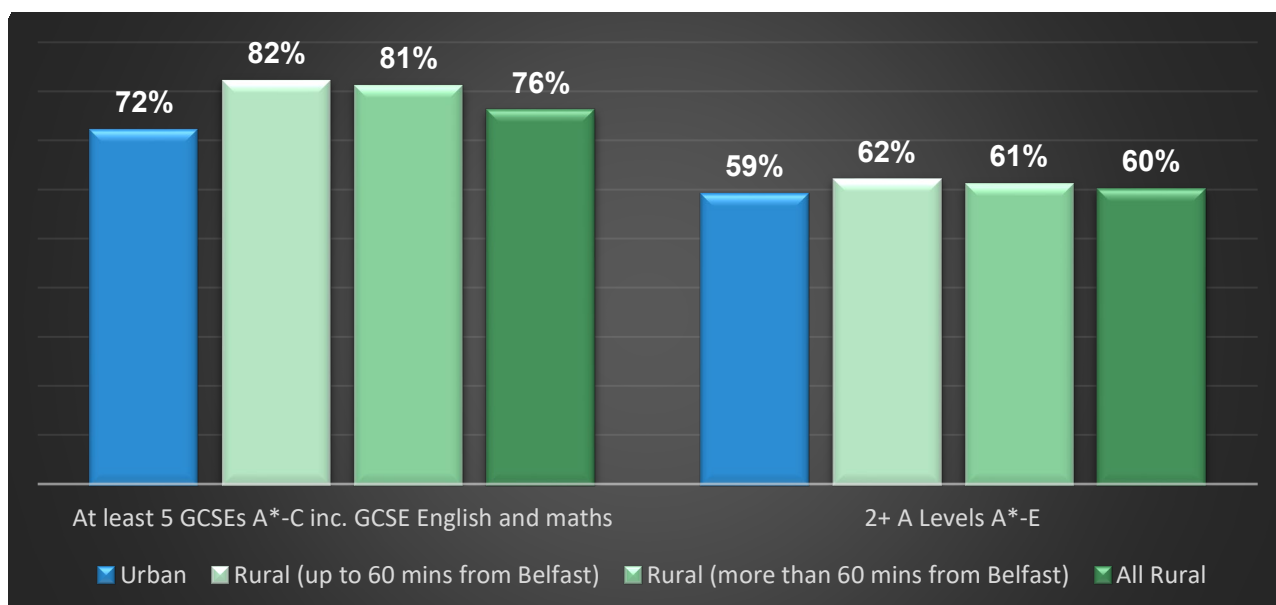
Figure 4: Highest Educational Qualification (persons aged 18-69), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019/20



Source: Continuous Household Survey (NISRA), 2019/20

The adult populations of rural and urban areas are very similar in terms of overall educational attainment. However, there are clear intra-rural differences in qualification levels. In 2020, rural dwellers who live more than an hour's drive from Belfast were less likely to have achieved 'degree level or higher' qualifications (23%) than their urban counterparts (26%), and were more likely to have no formal qualifications (27% compared to 21%).

Figure 5: Qualifications of School Leavers by Pupil Residence, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019/20

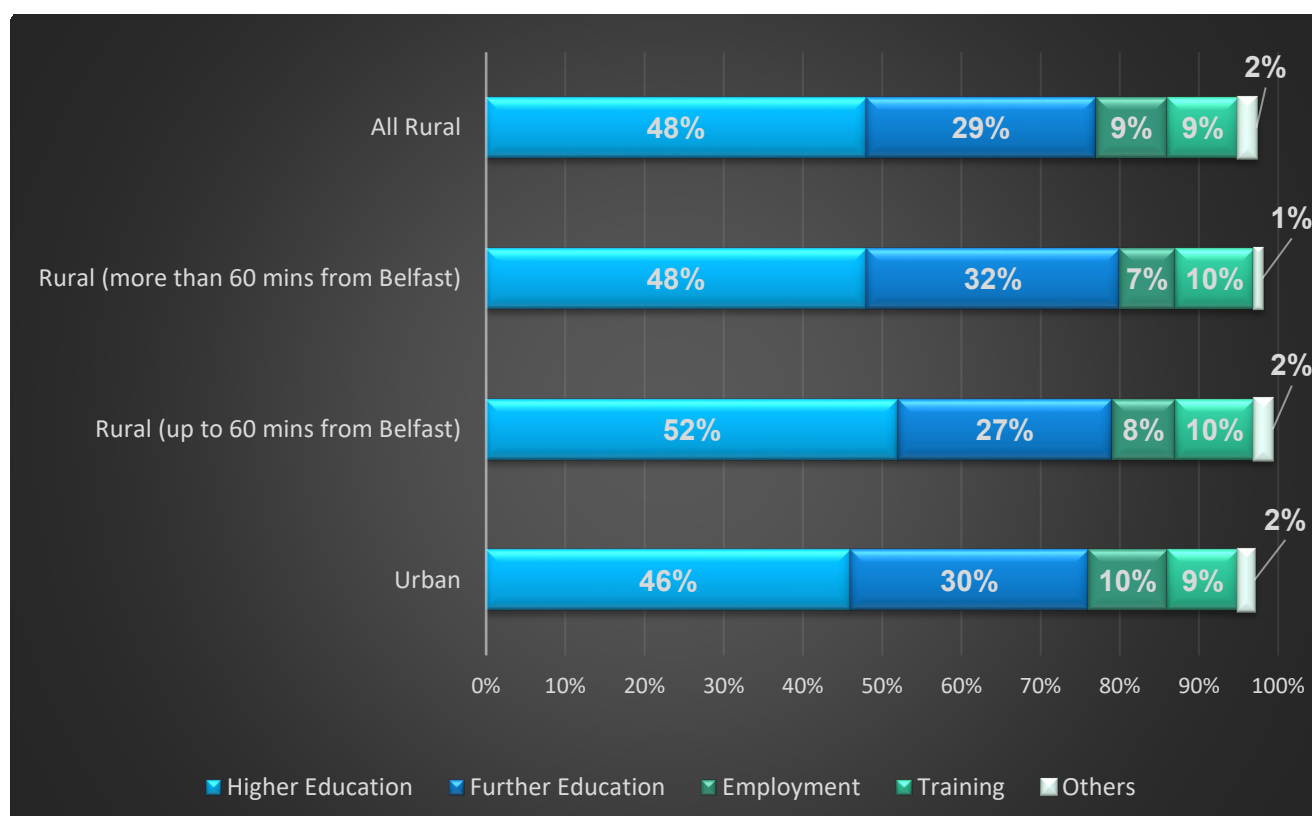


Source: NI School Leavers Survey, Department of Education (DE), 2019-20

In 2019/20, GCSE students from rural areas were slightly more academically successful, on average, than their urban counterparts. Just over three quarters (76%) of students from rural areas left school with at least 5 GCSEs including English and Maths, compared to 72% of students from urban areas (Figure 5).

Urban/rural differences in academic achievement at A-level were negligible, with 60% of rural school leavers having achieved two or more passes, compared to 59% of urban school leavers.

Figure 6: Destination of School Leavers by Pupil Residence, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019/20

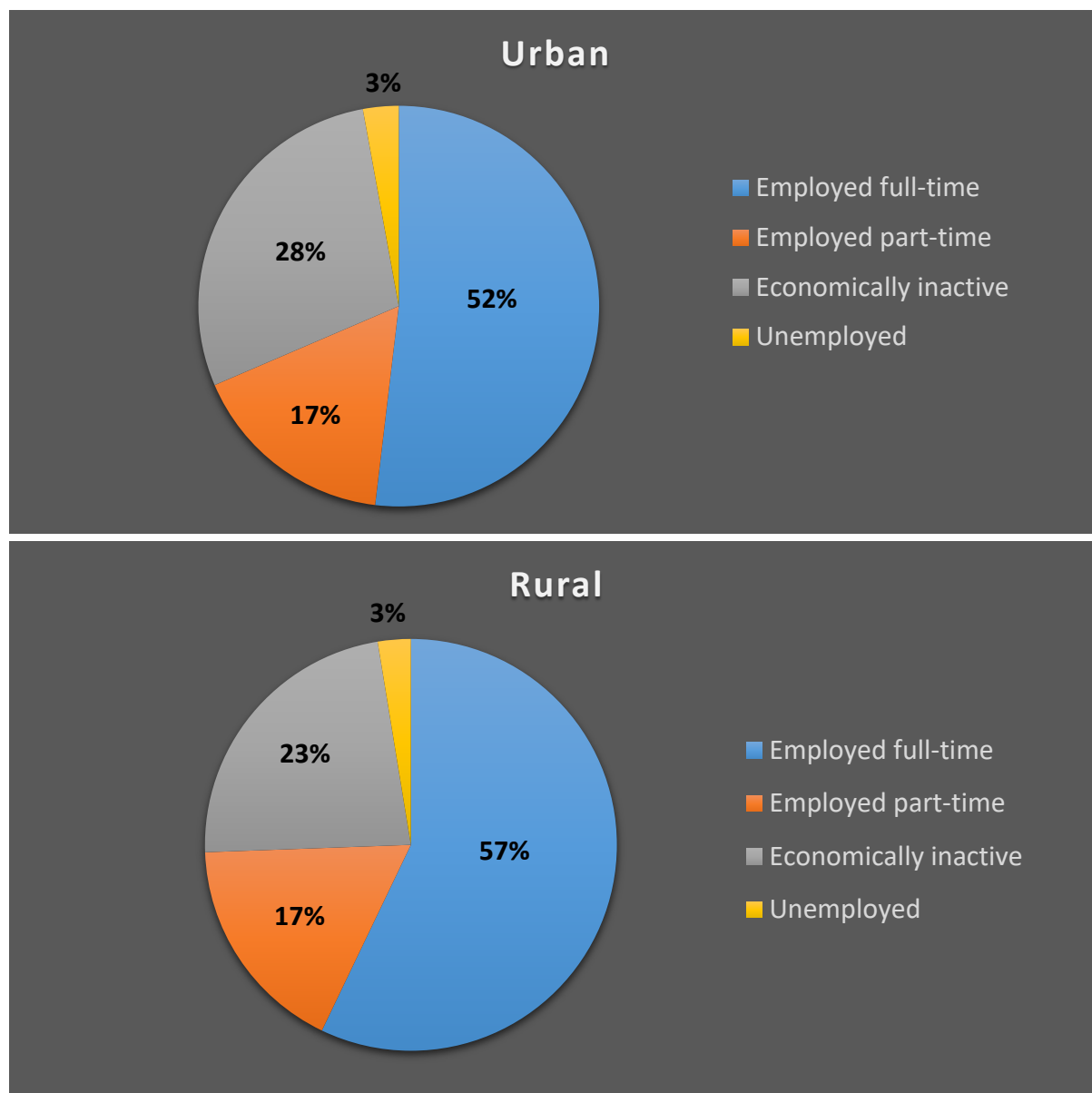


Source: NI School Leavers Survey, Department of Education (DE), 2019-20

In 2019/20, school leavers from rural areas were slightly more likely than those from urban areas to enter higher education, with the gap between urban and rural narrowing in recent years. Almost half (48%) of pupils living in rural areas within an hour of Belfast proceeded to higher education in 2019/20, compared with 52% of those in rural areas more distant from Belfast, and 46% of school leavers from urban areas.

## Employment

Figure 7: Economic Activity Status of NI Working Age Population, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2020



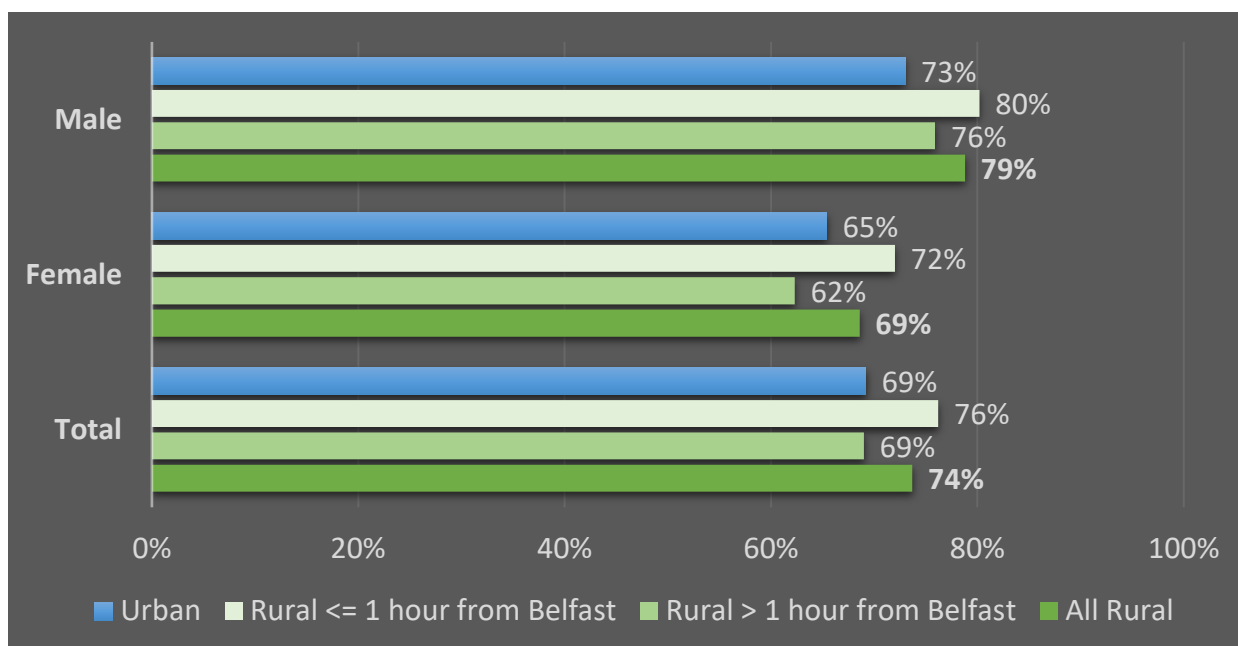
*\*Economic inactivity is defined as "people who are neither in employment nor unemployed as determined by the ILO measure. This group includes all those who are looking after a home, are long term sick or disabled, or are students, or retired."*

*\*\*Percentages may not sum due to rounding*

Source: NI Labour Force Survey, January-December 2020

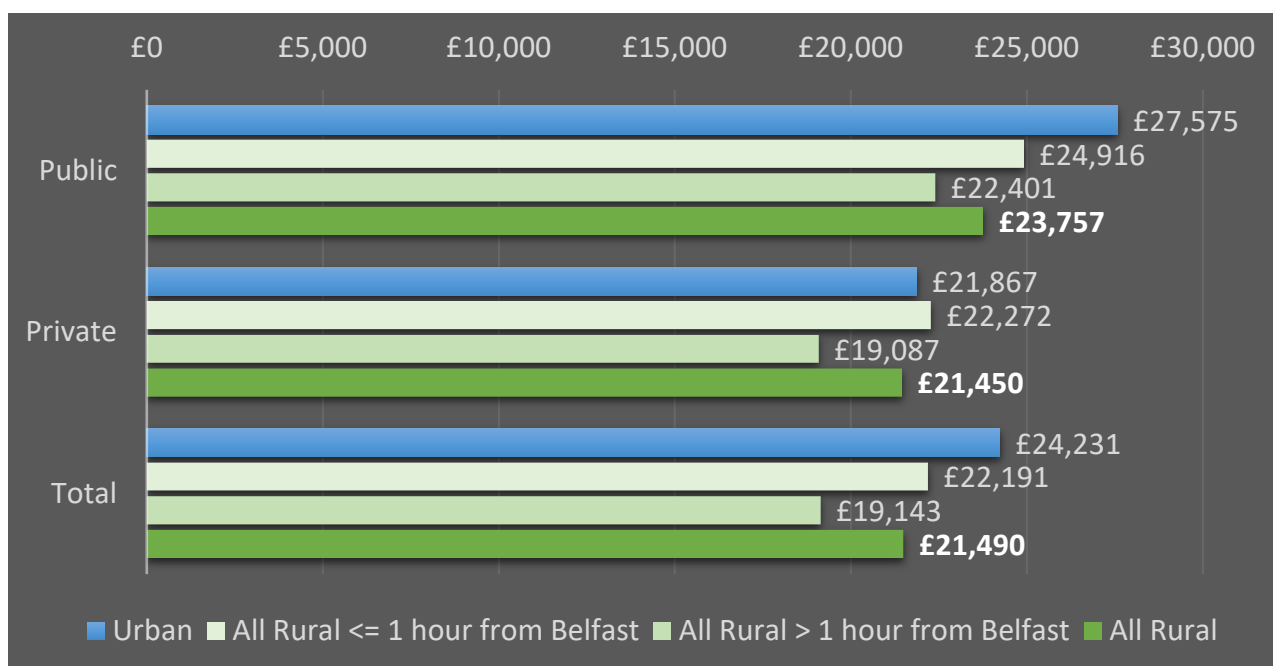
In 2020, people living in rural areas were more likely to be in employment, with almost three quarters (74%) employed either full or part-time. Similarly, this group was less likely to be economically inactive compared to those living in urban areas (Figure 8). Overall employment levels for both men and women were higher in the rural than the urban population, and employment was highest among those living in rural areas within an hour's commute of Belfast (76%).

Figure 8: Percentage of Working Age Population in Employment by Sex, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2020



Source: NI Labour Force Survey, January-December 2020

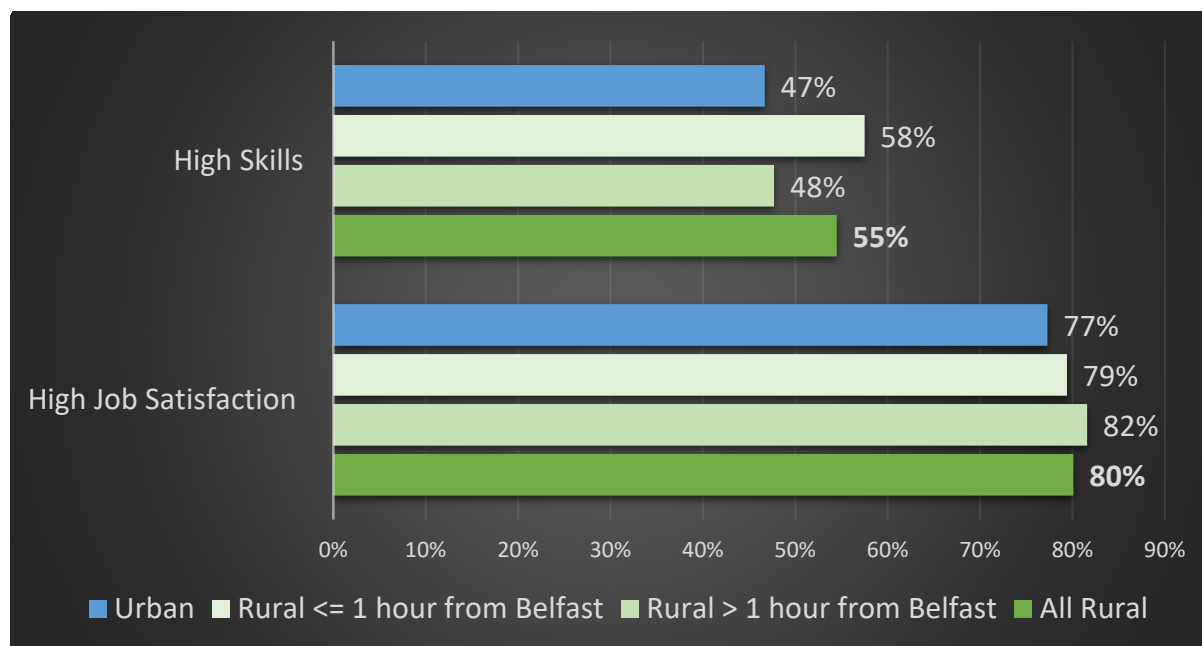
Figure 9: Median Annual Salary by Workplace Address/Sector, Urban/Rural/NI Comparison, 2020



Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) 2020, NISRA

In 2020, the average annual earnings of public sector workers were almost £4,000 higher in urban than in rural areas, while for those in the private sector, the difference in median annual salaries in rural and urban workplaces was negligible (Figure 9). Those working in rural areas more than an hour’s drive from Belfast have lowest average earnings of all, in either sector.

Figure 10: Job Skills and Job Satisfaction, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2020



Notes: Based on employee address. Skills level figures exclude self-employed and those who did not state a skills level. High job satisfaction defined as score of 4 or 5 out of 5.

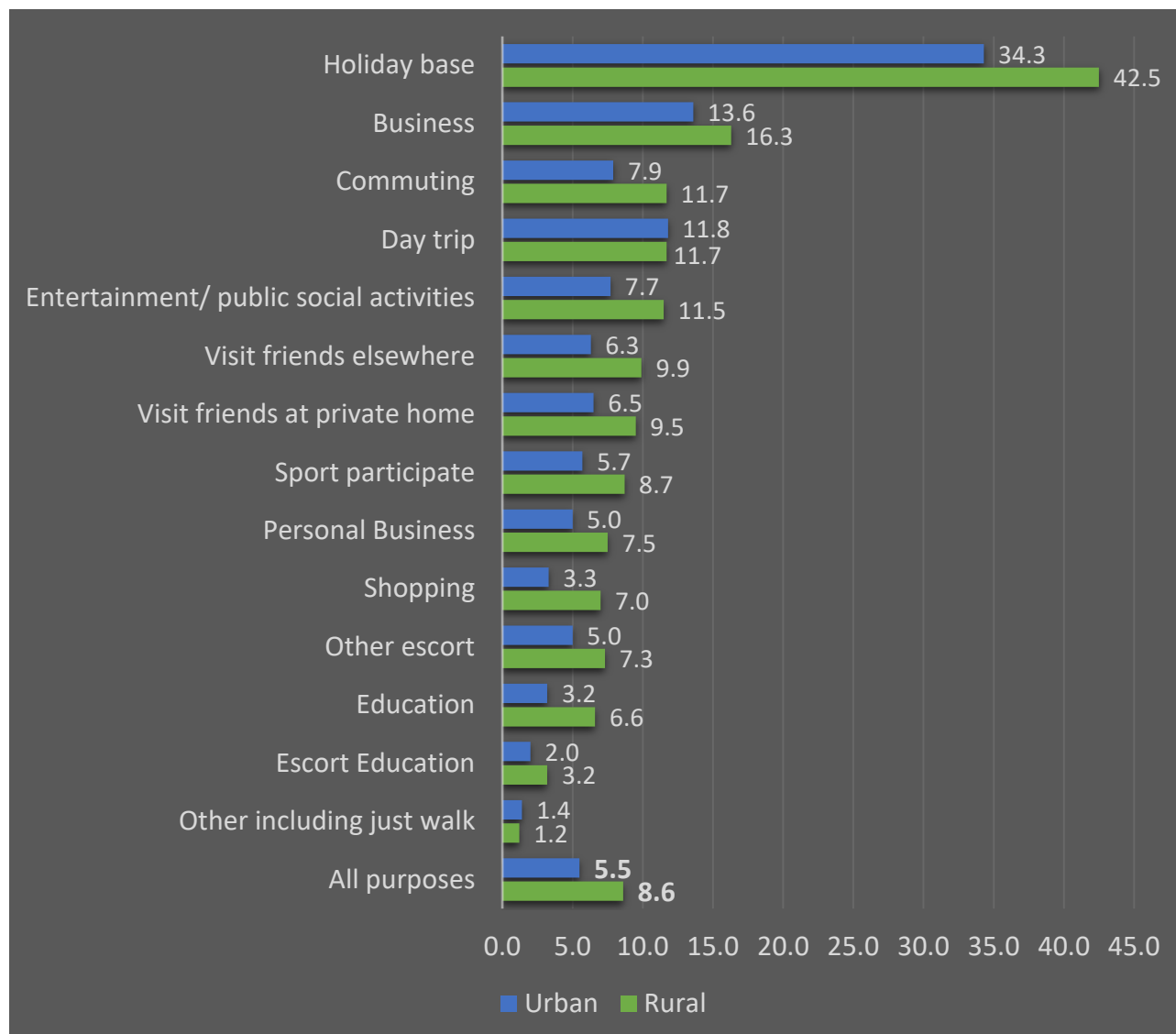
Source: NI Labour Force Survey, January-December 2020

Figure 10 illustrates the skill level of workers, and self-reported job satisfaction levels. On average, workers who live in rural areas are more likely to be highly skilled, and slightly more likely to report greater job satisfaction (80% of rural respondents reported high job satisfaction) than their urban counterparts (77%).

In 2020, more than three quarters (80%) of those in rural areas reported high levels of job satisfaction, however job satisfaction levels in each rural category, as well as in urban areas, have declined since 2018.

It is important to note that this information is based on the home address rather than the work address of respondents. Workers may commute long distances for more highly skilled and better paid employment than is available locally - this data reflects the quality of jobs in areas where people work, rather than live.

Figure 11: Average Distance Travelled (miles) for Business and Leisure, by purpose of journey, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2017-19

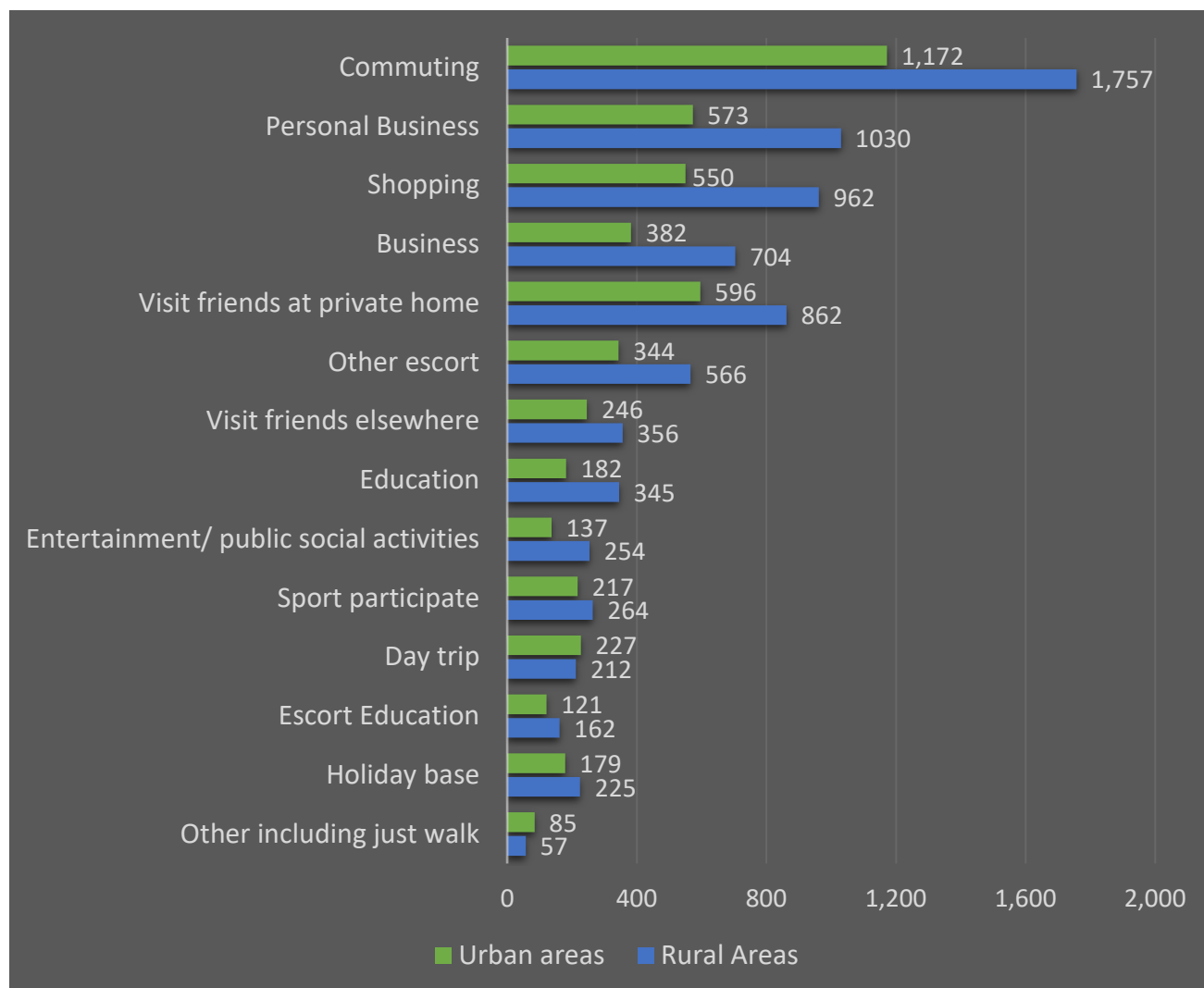


Source: Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI) 2017-2019, DfI

The Travel Survey NI for 2017-19 revealed that workers from rural areas had an average commute of almost 50% further than workers in towns and cities (Figure 11), and travelled on average almost 600 additional miles per year to their workplace (Figure 12).

Technological advances, combined with enhanced remote working infrastructure as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, will have enabled workers in some sectors to minimise the impact of the daily commute and work from home. The impact of these changes will likely be apparent in future analysis.

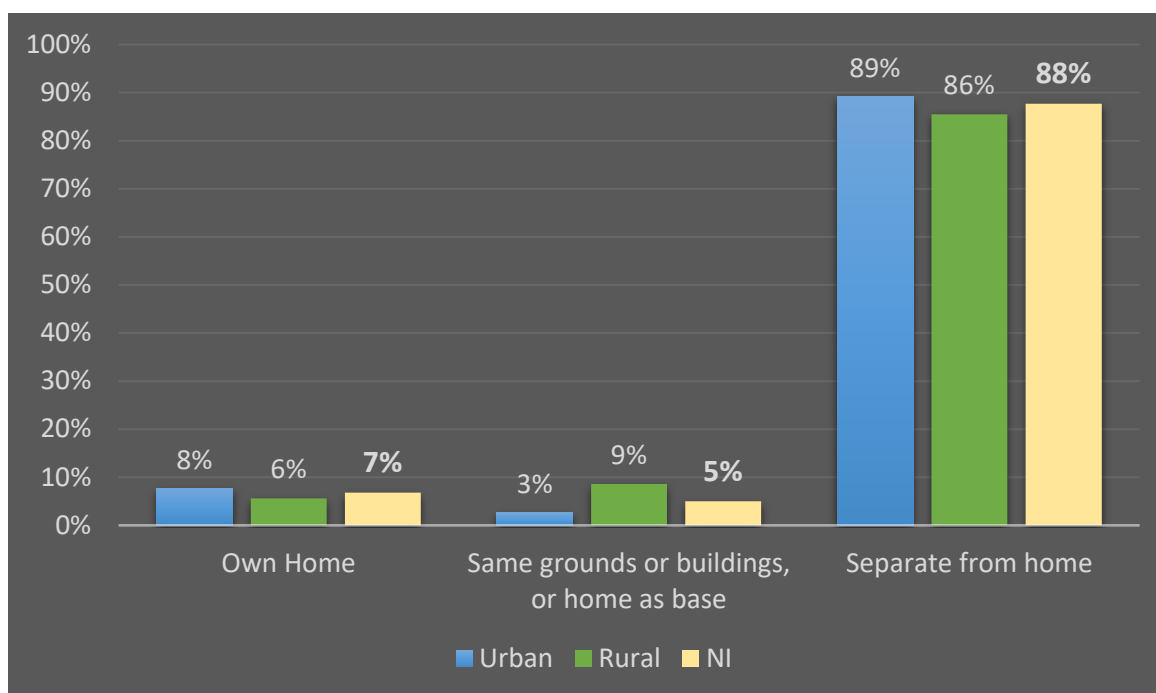
Figure 12: Total Miles Travelled (per person per year), by Journey Purpose, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2017-19



Source: Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI) 2017-2019, DfI

The 2020 UK Labour Force Survey revealed an increase in the proportions of rural (6%, from 4% in 2019) and urban (8%, from 3%) employees in NI worked exclusively from home (Figure 13). It would be reasonable to assume that these figures have been somewhat influenced by the recent shift for many public and private sector workers to alternative working patterns, including home working, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 13: Physical Location of Main Job, Urban/Rural/NI Comparison, 2021

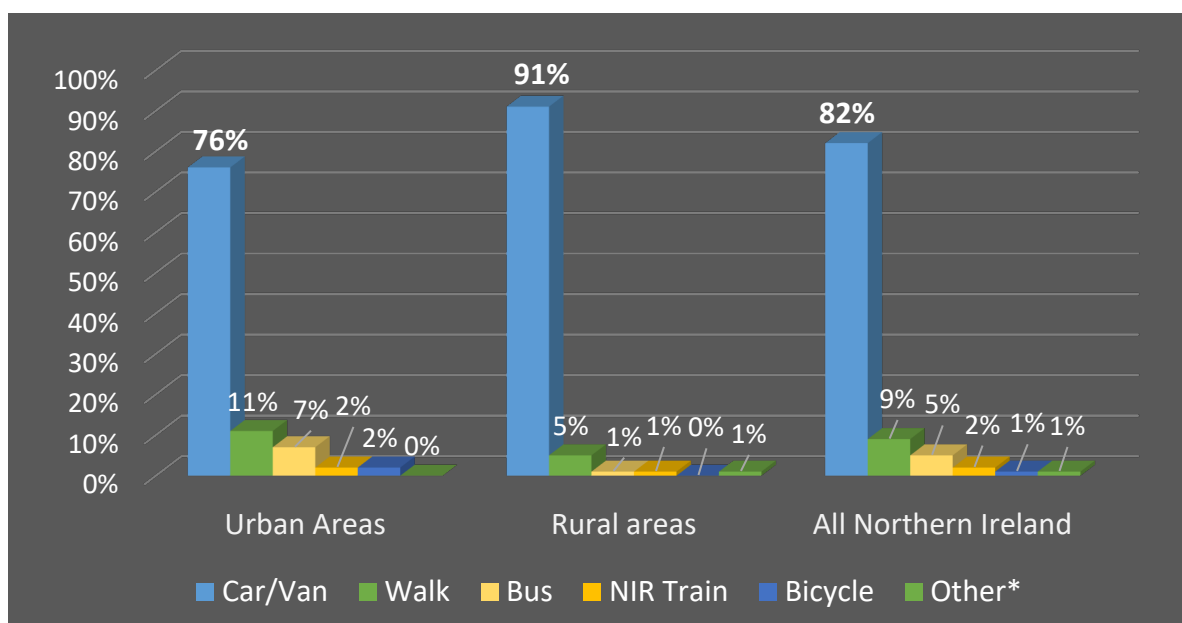


Note: Employed persons aged 16-64

\*Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Source: Labour Force Survey January-December 2020

Figure 14: Method of Travel to Work, Urban/Rural/NI Comparison, 2017-19



Notes: Respondents are those aged 16 and over who stated that they were in paid employment (or self-employed) in the week ending last Sunday, excluding those who worked at home

\*Other\* includes Motorbike, Moped, Scooter and Taxi/Minicab

Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Source: Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI) 2017-2019, DfI



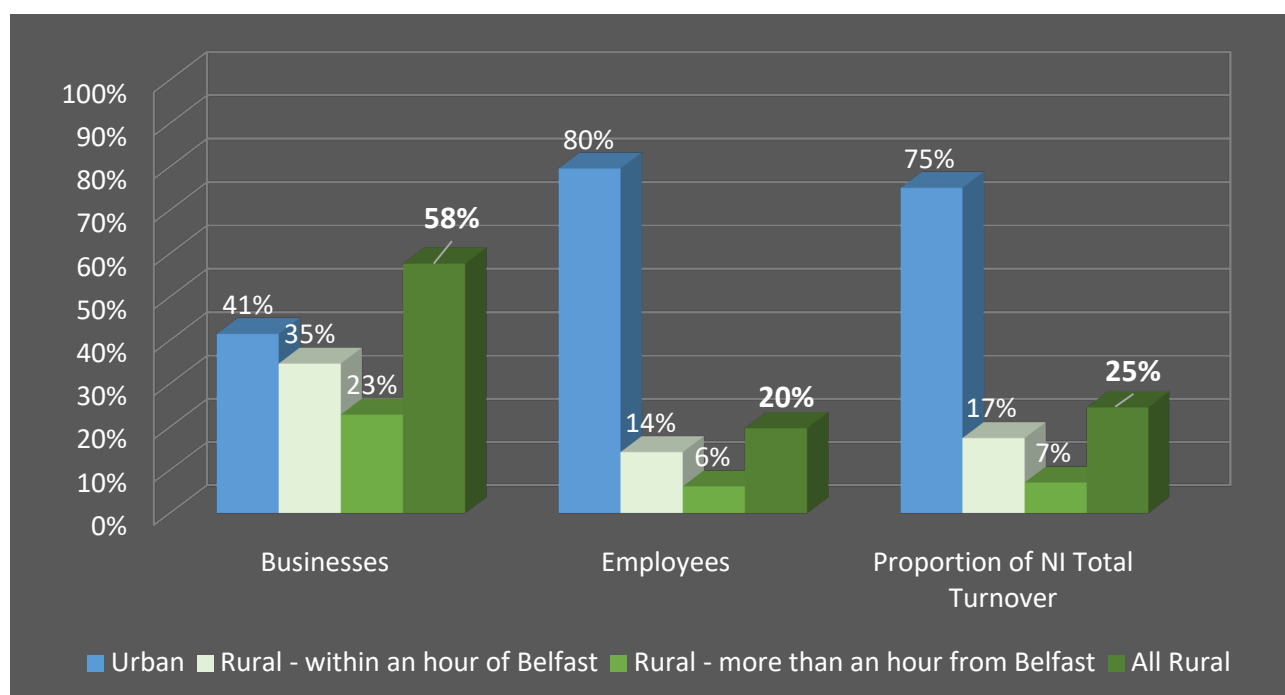
Private car or van was still by far the most common method of commuting in NI, for both urban and rural residents, according to the 2017-19 Travel Survey NI (Figure 14). The preference of a large majority of rural (91%), and around three quarters of urban (76%) workers for private transport may be influenced by longer average journey distances, and reduced availability of public transport in rural areas.

Urban workers are more likely to walk to work (11%) or to travel by bus (7%) than those from rural areas (5% and 1% respectively).

## Industry

In 2021, more than half (58%) of NI businesses are located in rural areas, yet rural businesses account for just 20% of employees, and around a quarter (25%) of all business turnover (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Urban and Rural Businesses, Employees, and Turnover, NI, 2021

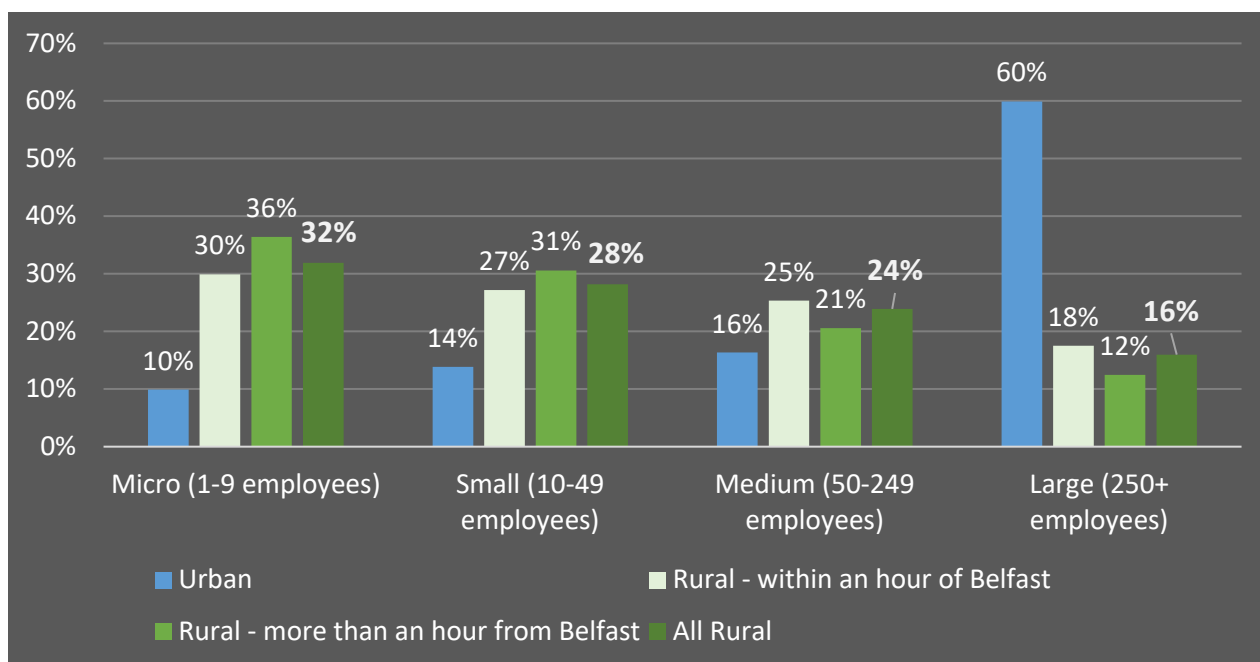


Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register 2021, DoF

Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Rural businesses in 2021 are typically small - just under a third (32%) of all rural businesses are classed as 'micro', and have between one and nine employees, with just 16% of rural businesses qualifying as 'Large' (i.e. having 250 or more employees), compared to 60% of urban businesses (Figure 16). Consequently, urban businesses account for approximately 75% of all business turnover in NI.

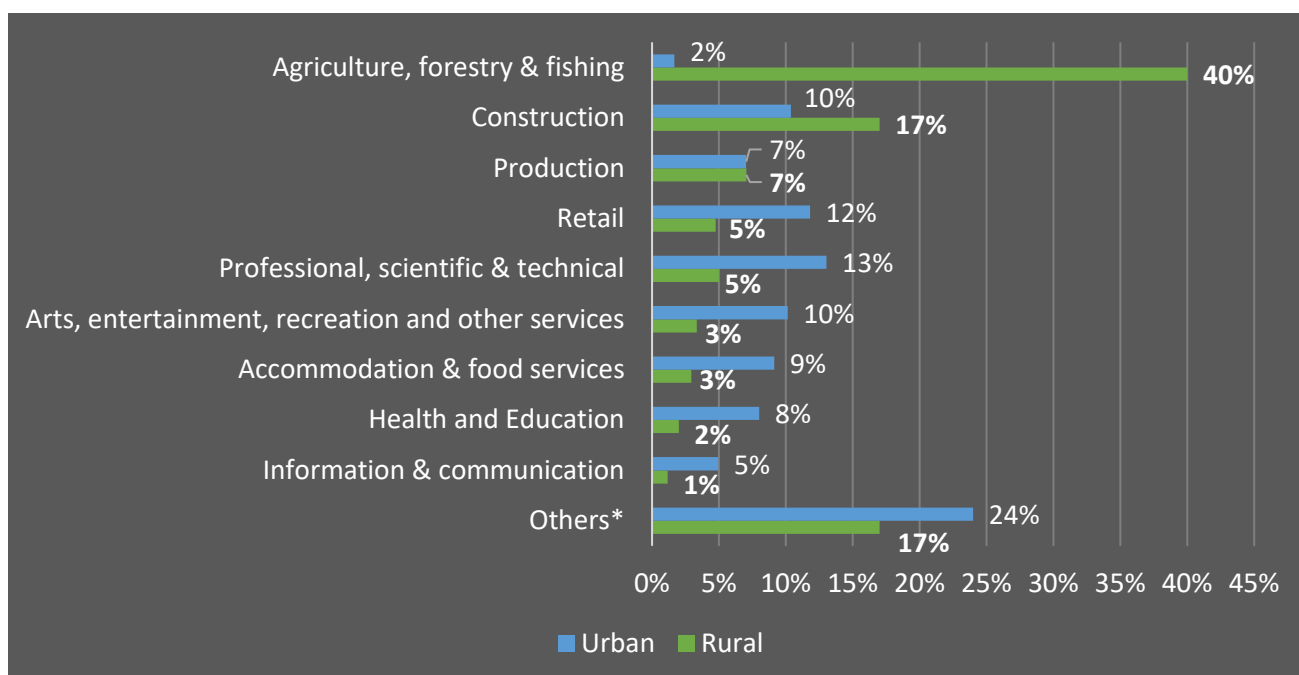
Figure 16: Business Size (Number of Employees), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2021



Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register 2021, DoF

In 2021, the rural and urban economies also differ substantially in terms of dominant sectors (Figure 17), with 40% of rural businesses belonging to the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors, followed by construction (17%). Urban businesses are diverse, and spread across a variety of industries, with professional, scientific and technical businesses (13%) the largest, closely followed by retail (12%), construction (10%), and arts, entertainment and recreation (10%).

Figure 17: NI Industry Sector Representation, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2021



*\*Others' include Finance, Insurance, Property, Public Administration, Transport and Storage*

*Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register 2021, DoF*

The predominance of agriculture businesses is even more pronounced in rural areas more than an hour from Belfast. Almost half (47%) of all businesses in these areas are engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing, with a further 17% in construction (Table 1).

*Table 1: Businesses by Industry Group, Urban and Rural, 2021*

Broad Industry Group <sup>(1)</sup>	Urban	Rural			Total
		Rural - up to an hour from Belfast	Rural - over an hour from Belfast	All Rural	
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	2%	35%	47%	40%	<b>23%</b>
Production	7%	8%	6%	7%	<b>7%</b>
Construction	10%	17%	17%	17%	<b>14%</b>
Retail	12%	5%	5%	5%	<b>8%</b>
Accommodation & food services	9%	3%	3%	3%	<b>5%</b>
Information & communication	5%	2%	1%	1%	<b>3%</b>
Professional, scientific & technical	13%	5%	3%	5%	<b>8%</b>
Health and Education	8%	3%	2%	2%	<b>5%</b>
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	10%	4%	3%	3%	<b>6%</b>
Others*	24%	19%	15%	18%	<b>20%</b>
<b>All Industries</b>	<b>32,985</b>	<b>26,895</b>	<b>17,760</b>	<b>44,655</b>	<b>77,640</b>

*1 For full description of standard industrial classification (2007) see Office for National Statistics: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/ukstandardindustrialclassificationofeconomicactivities/uksic2007>*

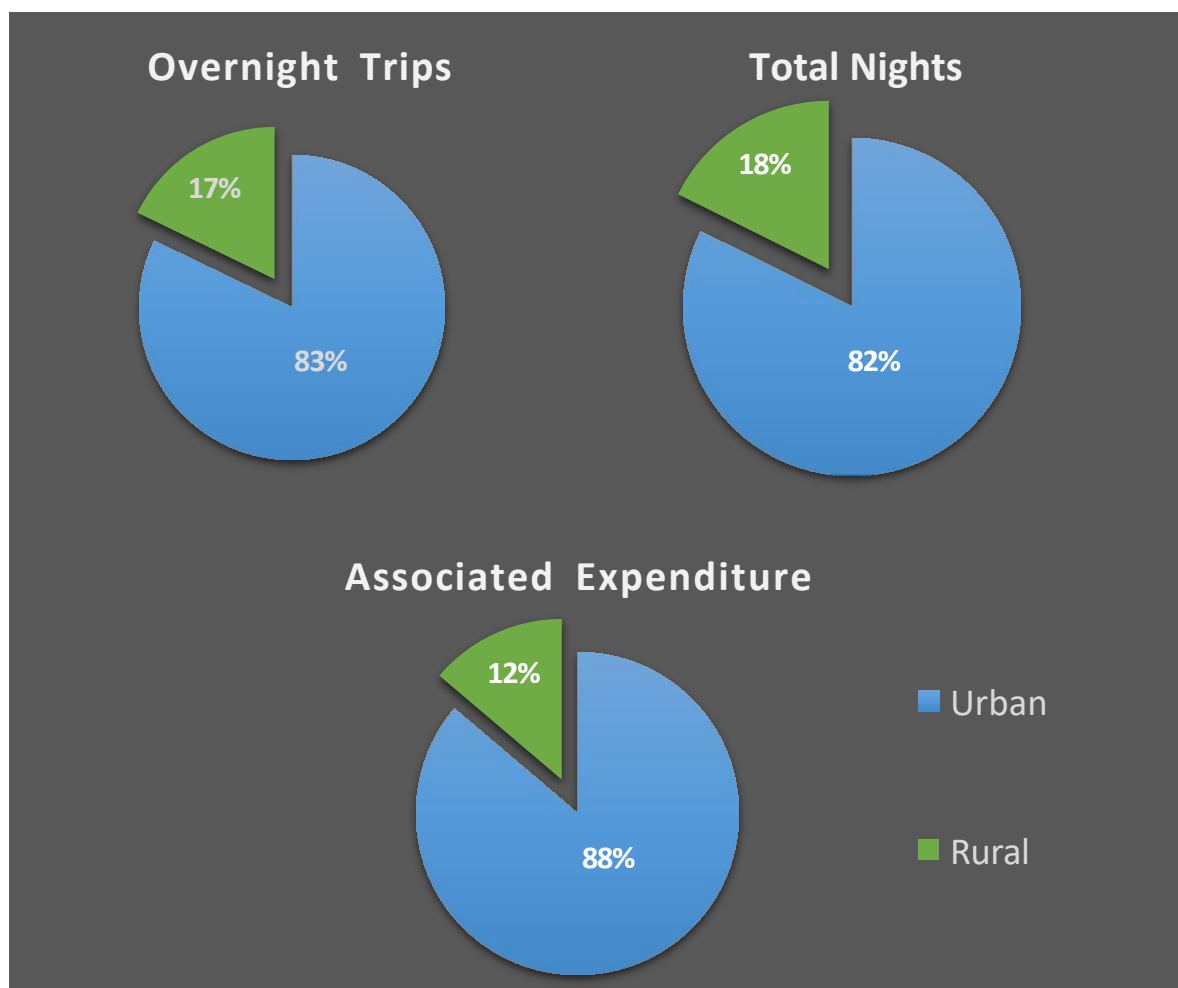
*\*Others' include Finance, Insurance, Property, Public Administration, Transport and Storage*

*Percentages may not sum due to rounding*

*Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register 2021, DoF*

## Tourism

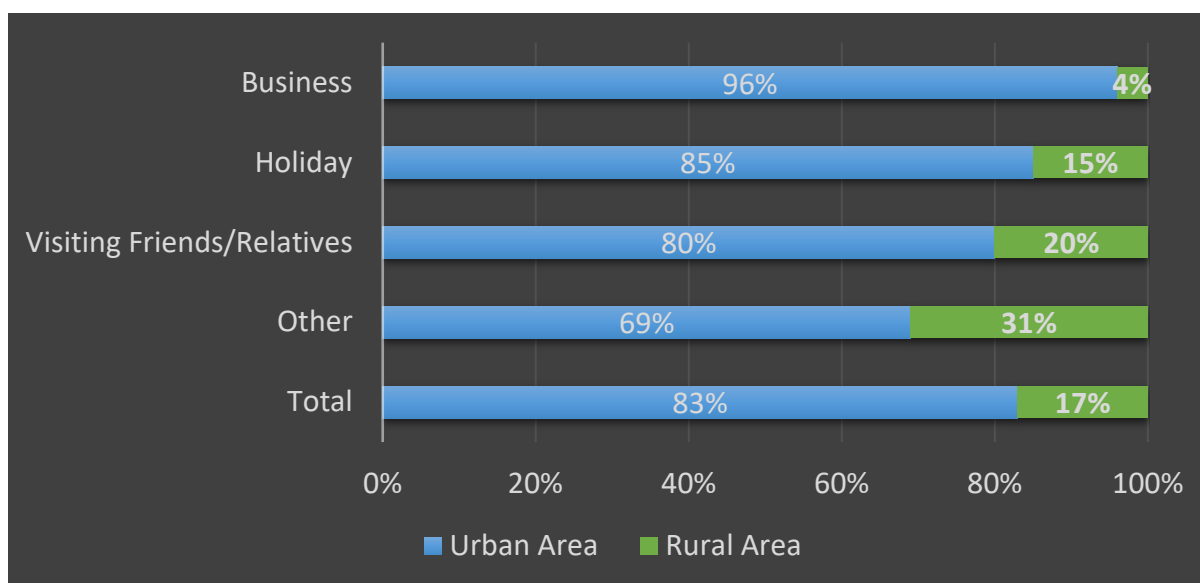
Figure 18: Overnight Trips to NI (Visits to Urban and Rural Areas), 2019



Sources: NI Tourism Statistics (NISRA) 2019, Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS), NISRA, Continuous Household Survey (CHS), NISRA, Survey of Overseas Travellers (SOT), Failte Ireland, Household Travel Survey (HTS), Central Statistics Office (CSO)

In 2019, just 17% of all overnight visits to NI, and 12% of associated expenditure, occurred in rural locations (Figure 18). These figures include visits within NI by people that live here, as well as by visitors from other countries. Total tourist expenditure on overnight trips in rural areas in 2019 was much smaller than in urban areas - £129m compared to £835m, perhaps unsurprising given the predominance of urban settings as tourist destinations.

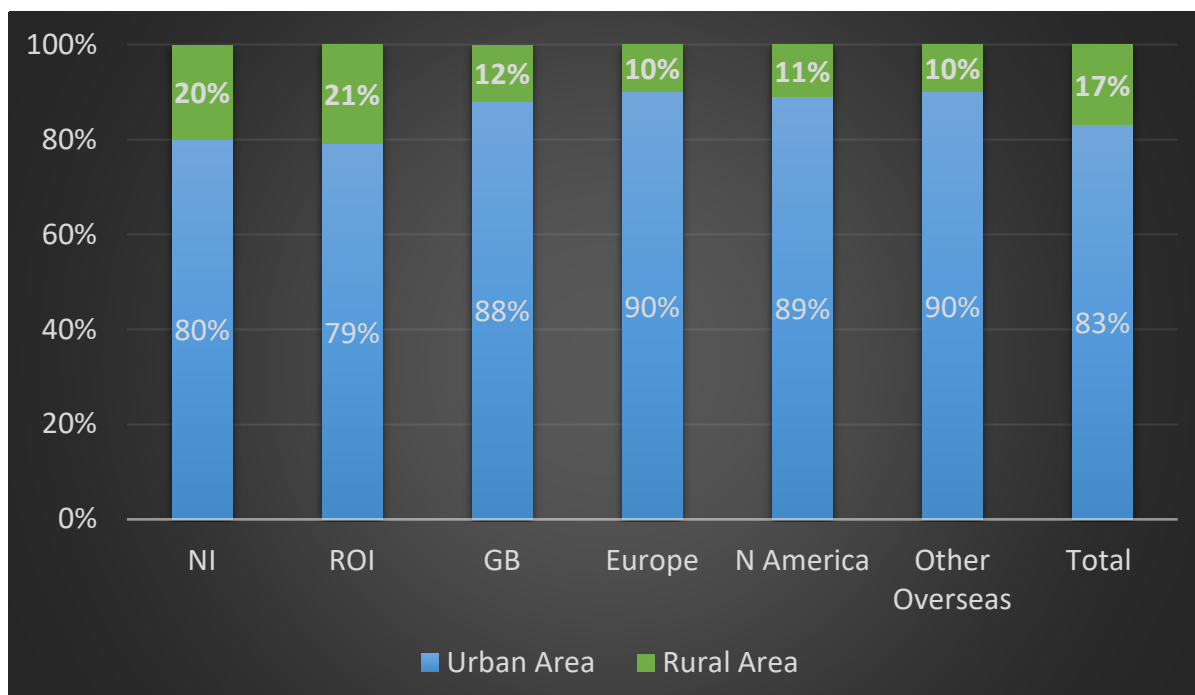
Figure 19: Overnight Trips to NI by Purpose of Visit, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019



Sources: NI Tourism Statistics (NISRA) 2019, Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS), NISRA, Continuous Household Survey (CHS), NISRA, Survey of Overseas Travellers (SOT), Failte Ireland, Household Travel Survey (HTS), Central Statistics Office (CSO)

In 2019, 17% of all overnight visits were to rural areas, with a similar proportion of overnight visits (20%) comprising visits to friends and relatives. Just 4% of trips for business purposes were to a rural area, a decrease from 10% in 2018 (Figure 19).

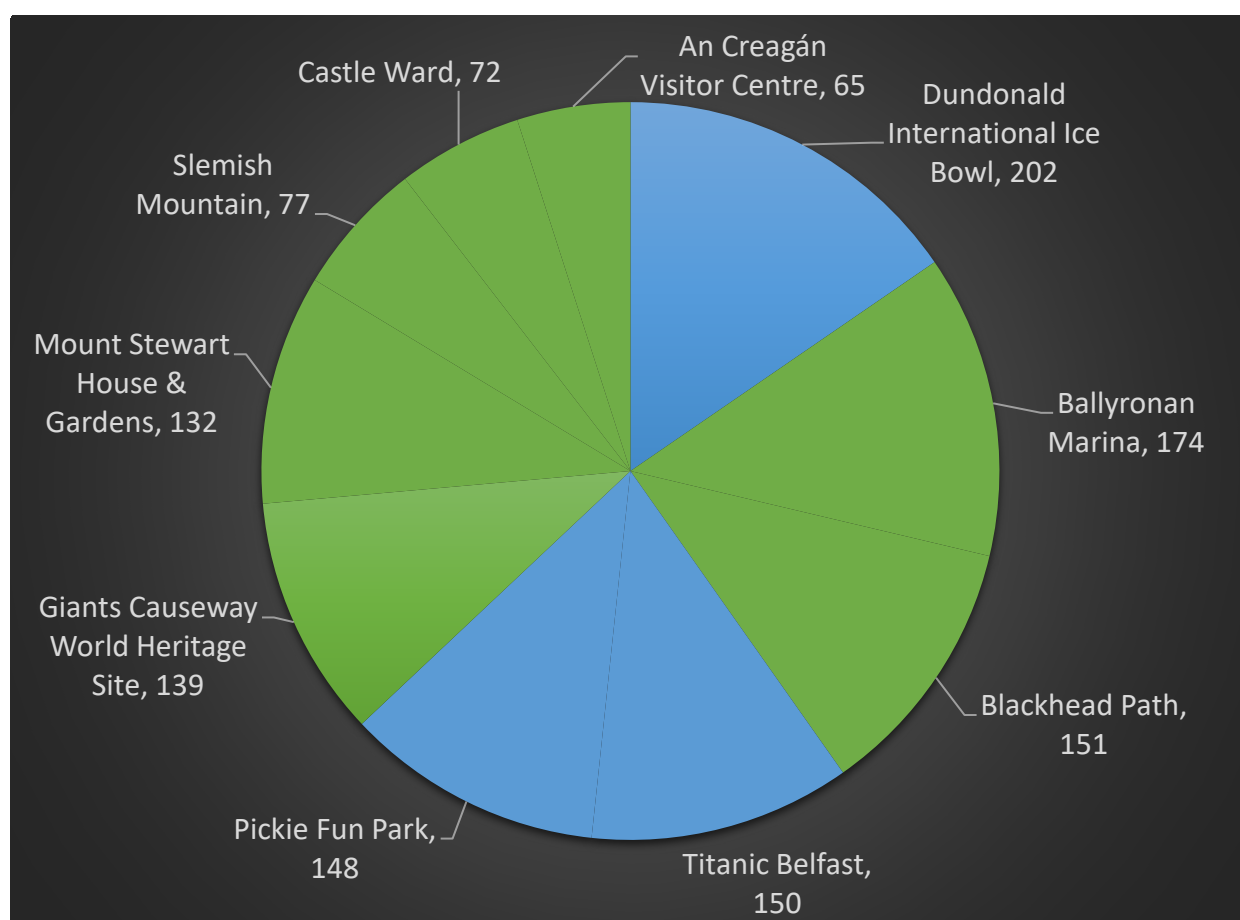
Figure 20: Overnight Trips to NI by Country of Residence, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019



Sources: NI Tourism Statistics (NISRA) 2019, Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS), NISRA, Continuous Household Survey (CHS), NISRA, Survey of Overseas Travellers (SOT), Failte Ireland, Household Travel Survey (HTS), Central Statistics Office (CSO)

20% of overnight trips by NI residents were to a rural location, a decline of 3% from 2020, with a similar proportion (21%) of visitors from the Republic of Ireland making overnight trips to rural areas (Figure 20). Visits made by those coming from outside the island of Ireland were much less likely to be to a rural location.

Figure 21: Number of Visits (000s) to the Top 10 NI Attractions (Urban and Rural), 2020

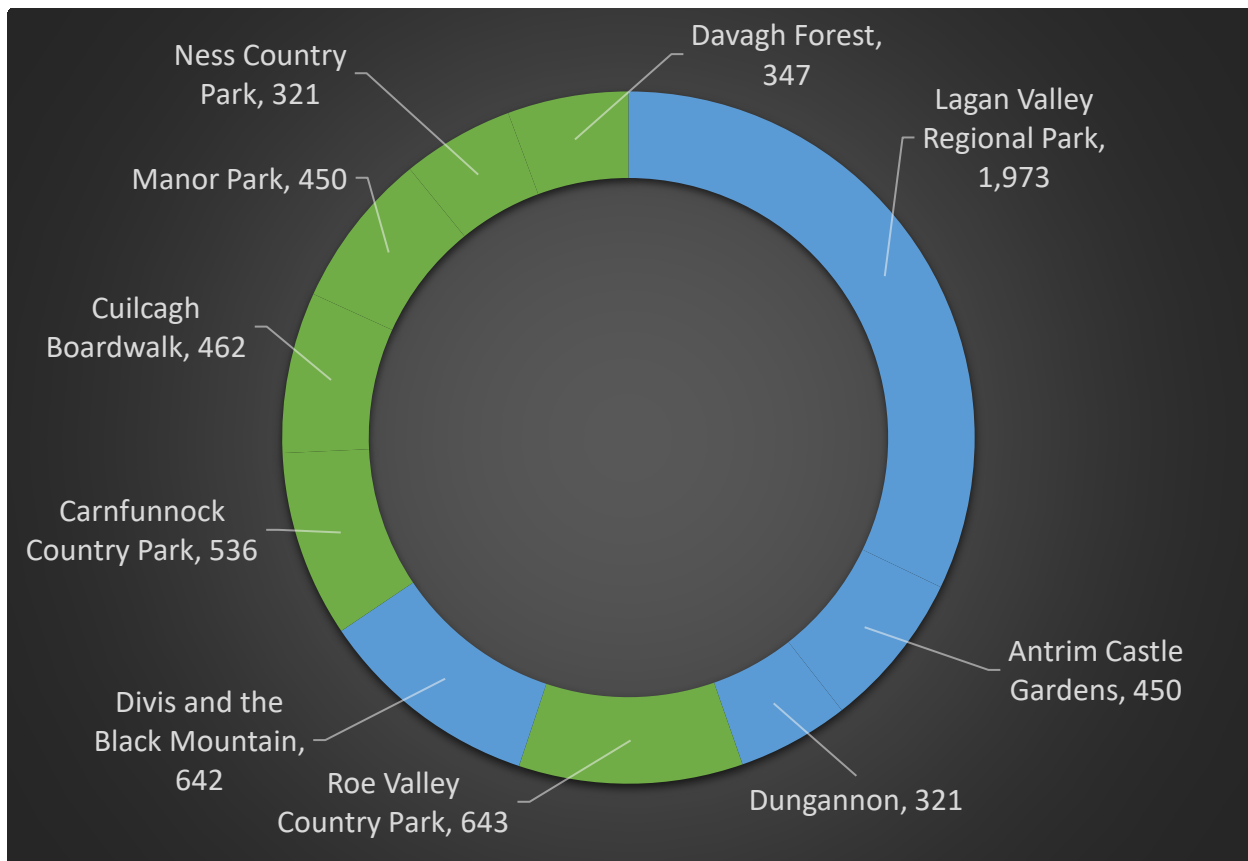


Source: NI Visitor Attraction Survey (NISRA) 2020

In 2020, 62% of all visits to the top ten tourist attractions in NI (Figure 21), and just under half (45%) of those to the top ten parks, country parks, forests and gardens (Figure 22), are in rural locations. Seven of the top ten attractions overall were located in rural areas.

It should be noted that restrictions on public life and the necessary closure of visitor attractions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic mean that these results should be interpreted with caution, and are not necessarily indicative of a larger trend.

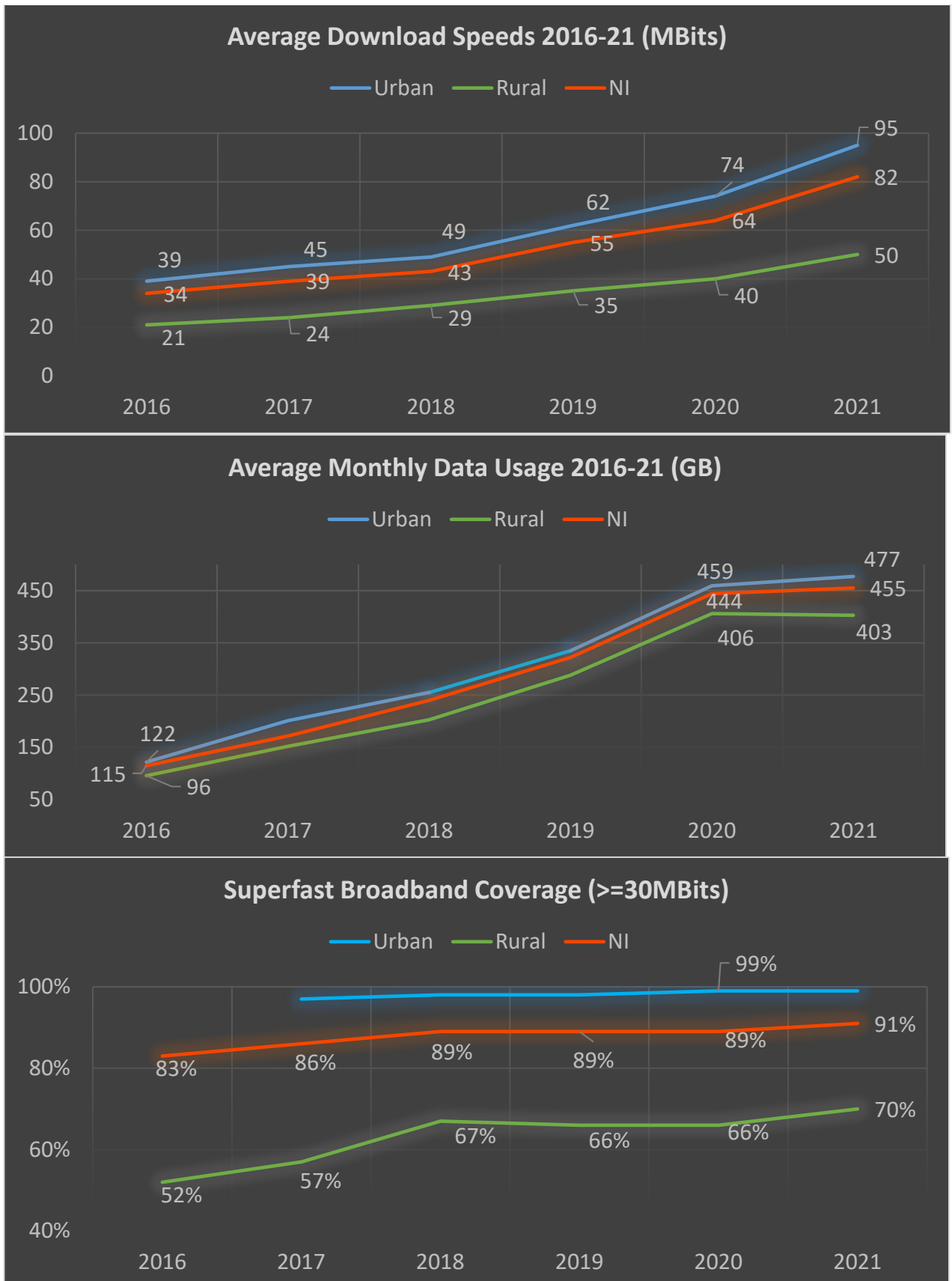
Figure 22: Visits (000s) to Top 10 Parks, Country Parks, Forests and Gardens (Urban and Rural), 2020



Source: NI Visitor Attraction Survey (NISRA) 2020

## Connectivity

Figure 23: NI Average Broadband Speeds, Coverage and Data Usage, Urban/NI/Rural Comparison, 2016-21



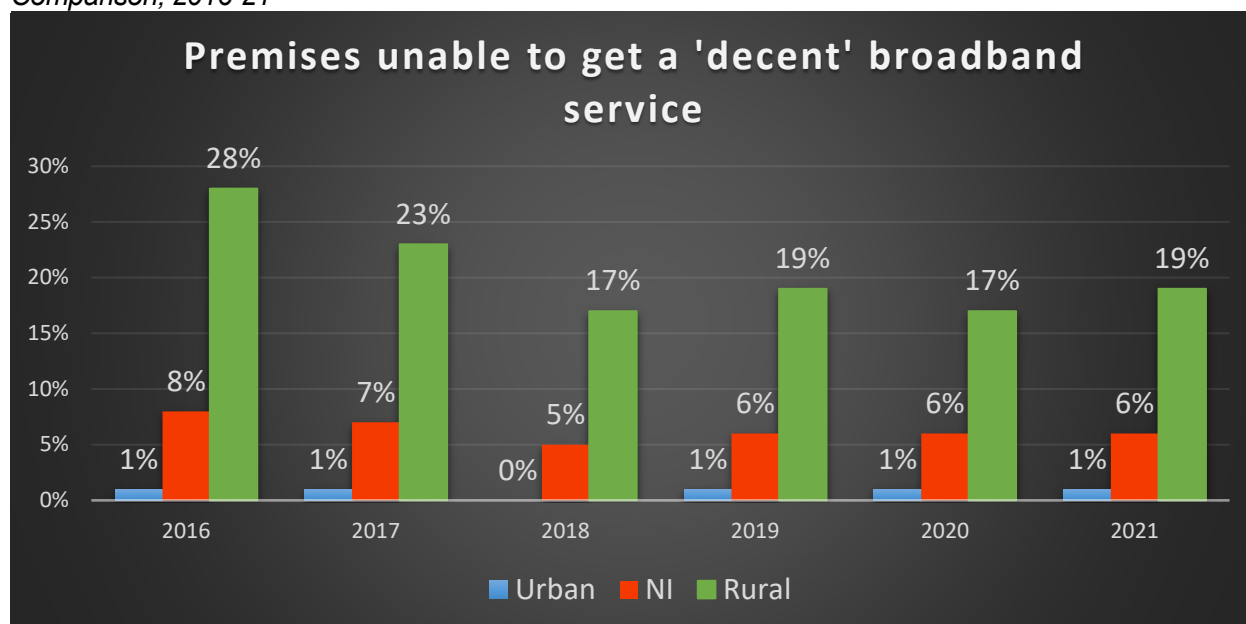


Broadband speeds and availability, though improving, are still much lower in rural than in urban areas, due in part to the disparity in infrastructure costs (Figure 23). This issue is UK- wide, but appears to be particularly pronounced in NI, due to how the rural population is distributed.

Investment in digital infrastructure such as the ongoing rollout of Project Stratum has narrowed this gap considerably in the last number of years. In 2021, 70% of rural properties in NI have access to superfast speeds.

Average download speeds and data usage have increased markedly in both urban and rural areas since 2018, yet both remain higher in urban areas. For some rural properties, access to a functional broadband connection remains an issue, with 19% of internet-enabled rural premises in NI still unable to achieve a ‘decent’ broadband speed<sup>4</sup> in 2021 (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Percentage of NI Properties Unable to achieve a ‘Decent’ broadband service, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2016-21



\*Decent service is defined by Ofcom as at least 10Mbit/s download, and 1Mbit/s upload speeds  
Based on ‘Locale’ classification of Urban and Rural

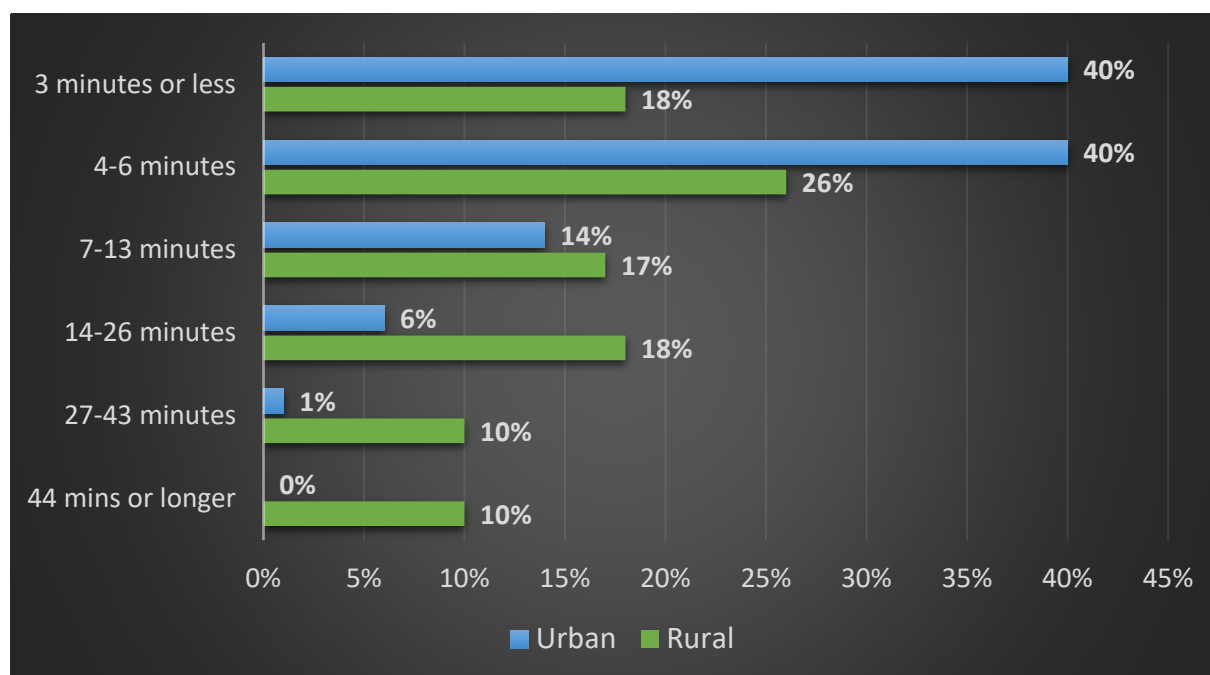
Source: Ofcom Connected Nations 2015-21, Northern Ireland Reports  
[https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/229721/connected-nations-2021-ni-report.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/229721/connected-nations-2021-ni-report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Defined by Ofcom as at least 10Mbit/s download and 1Mbit/s upload speeds, Ofcom, 2021: Connected Nations 2021, Northern Ireland report

In terms of physical connectivity, the availability of public transport in rural areas is also much inferior to that in towns and cities, and crucial rural bus services are under increasing threat due to decreasing profitability and reductions in subsidies.

The most recent published data from the Travel Survey NI (2017-19) revealed that just 18% of rural dwellers live within a 3 minute walk of the nearest bus stop, compared with 40% of those living in urban areas – with 10% of rural dwellers living a 44 minute or longer walk to their nearest stop (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Walking time to nearest bus stop, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2017-19



Source: TSNI (DfI), 2017-19

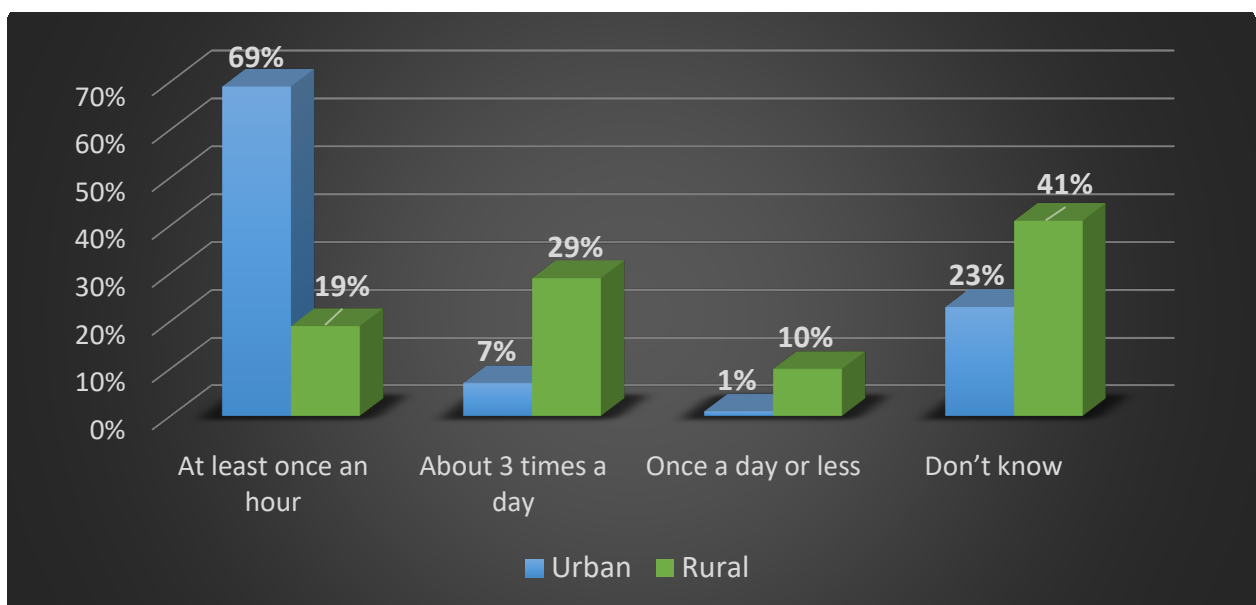
This may account for the large majority of adults living in rural areas who report holding a full driving licence (86%, compared with 73% of urban dwellers). More than half (52%) of rural households reported ‘never’ using bus services.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jack, C and Patten, N. *The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers’ quality of life in Northern Ireland; a baseline review*, Agri- food and Biosciences Institute, 2014.

Distances to railway stations tend to be even longer for rural dwellers. When asked about walking distance from a railway station, an overwhelming majority (92%) of rural dwellers responded either that they would have to walk for 44 minutes or more, or that the distance was so great that the question did not apply.

The frequency of public transport services also differs greatly between urban and rural areas. More than two thirds (69%) of urban dwellers reported a bus service frequency of at least once an hour, compared with 19% of those who live in rural locations (Figure 26). The frequency of rail services may be of less significance to the rural population, as railway stations tend to be concentrated in urban areas.

Figure 26: Bus Service Frequency, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2017-19

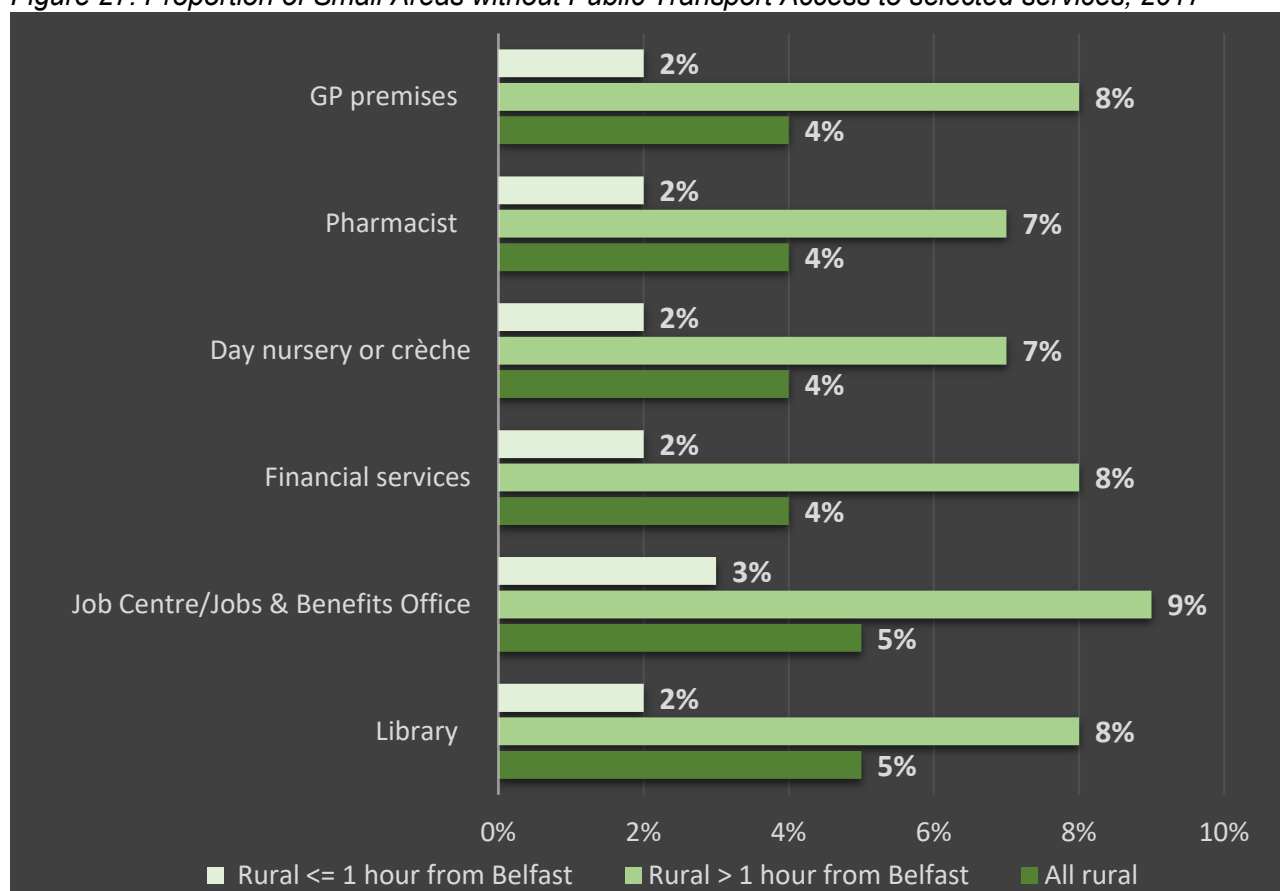


Source: TSNI (DfI), 2017-19

## Access to Services

Access to key services can be a marker of disadvantage for people in rural communities, particularly for those living in more remote areas and for those without private transport. In rural areas more than an hour from Belfast, NISRA's Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM, developed in 2017) indicates that access to key services by public transport is particularly poor (Figure 27) - while for others, journeys made by public transport may simply be impractical due to a combination of journey length and remote location.

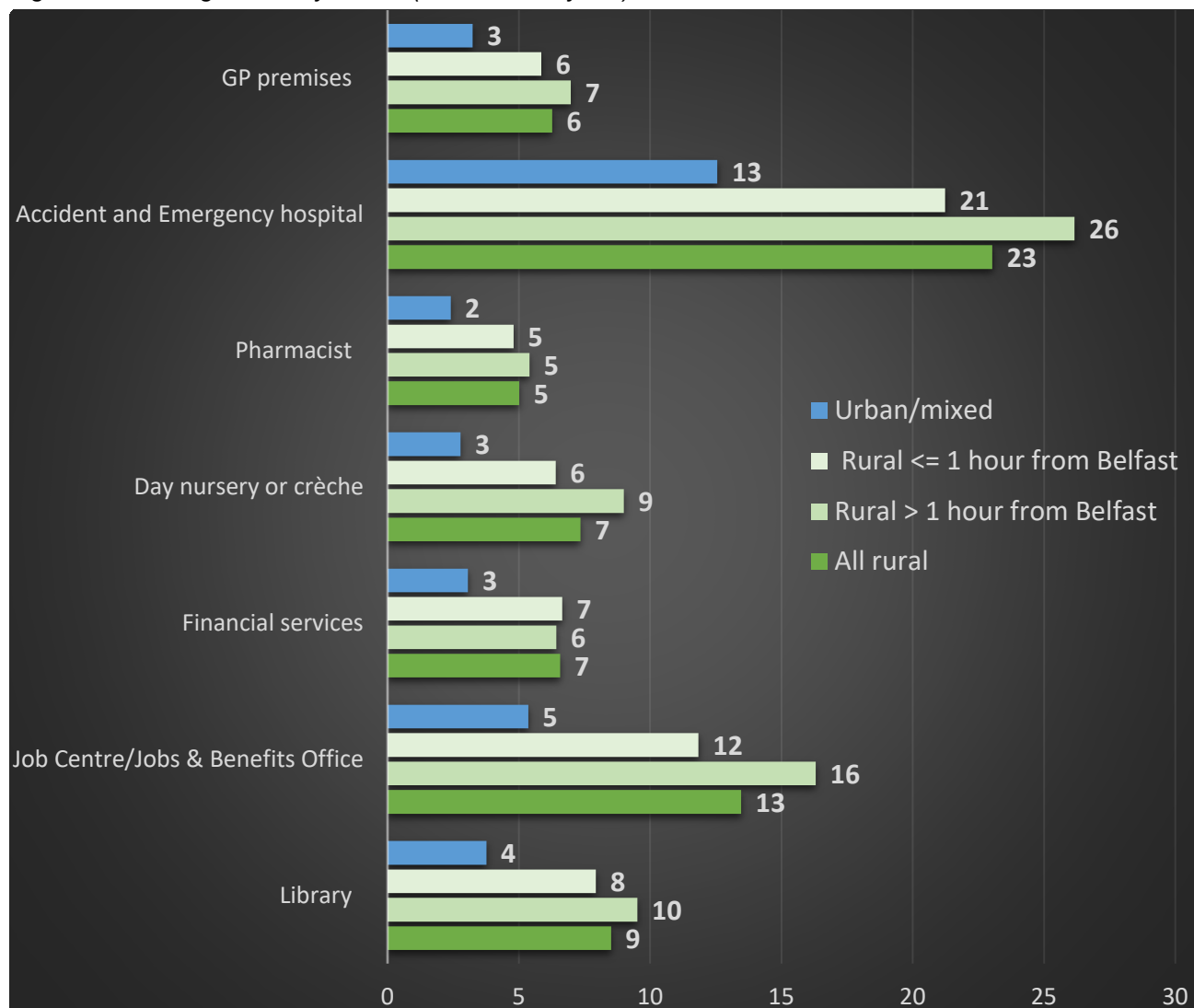
Figure 27: Proportion of Small Areas without Public Transport Access to selected services, 2017



Note: 'Financial Services' includes ATMs, banks, building societies and credit unions.

Source: Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM), 2017

Figure 28: Average Journey Times (in minutes, by car) to selected services, 2017



Notes: 'Financial Services' includes ATMs, banks, building societies and credit unions.

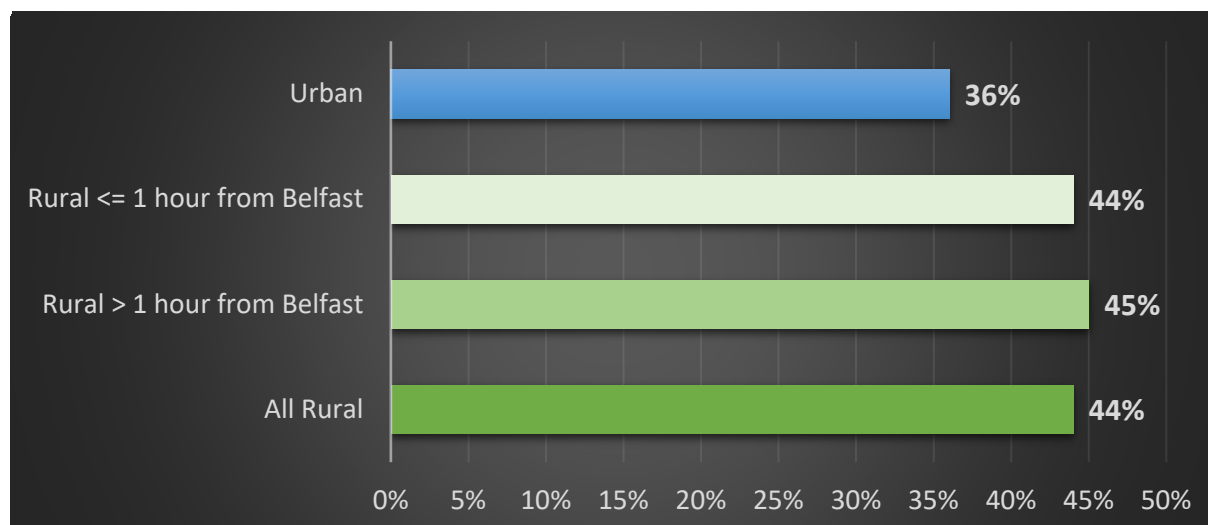
Source: Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM), 2017

For rural dwellers travelling by car, journey times to key services are substantially higher as for those living in towns and cities, sometimes double or greater, and this disparity is again more pronounced in rural areas more distant from Belfast.

The greatest disparity travel times are to hospitals with an accident and emergency facility, and to job centres/jobs and benefits offices. Those living in rural areas more than an hour from Belfast, are on average, a 26 minute drive away from an Accident and Emergency department, compared to an average 13 minute drive time for those living in urban areas (Figure 28).

## Quality of Life

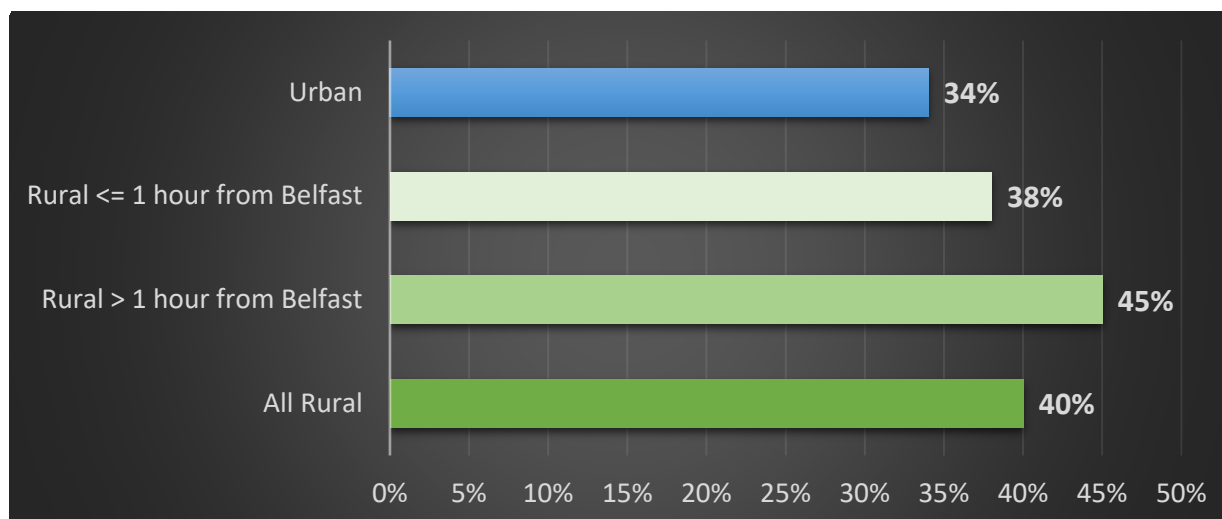
Figure 29: Self-Reported 'High' Personal Happiness, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019-20



Note: Based on those scoring 9-10 on the question: 'Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'.

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Population Survey, 2019/20

Figure 30: Self-Reported 'High' Life Satisfaction, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019-20

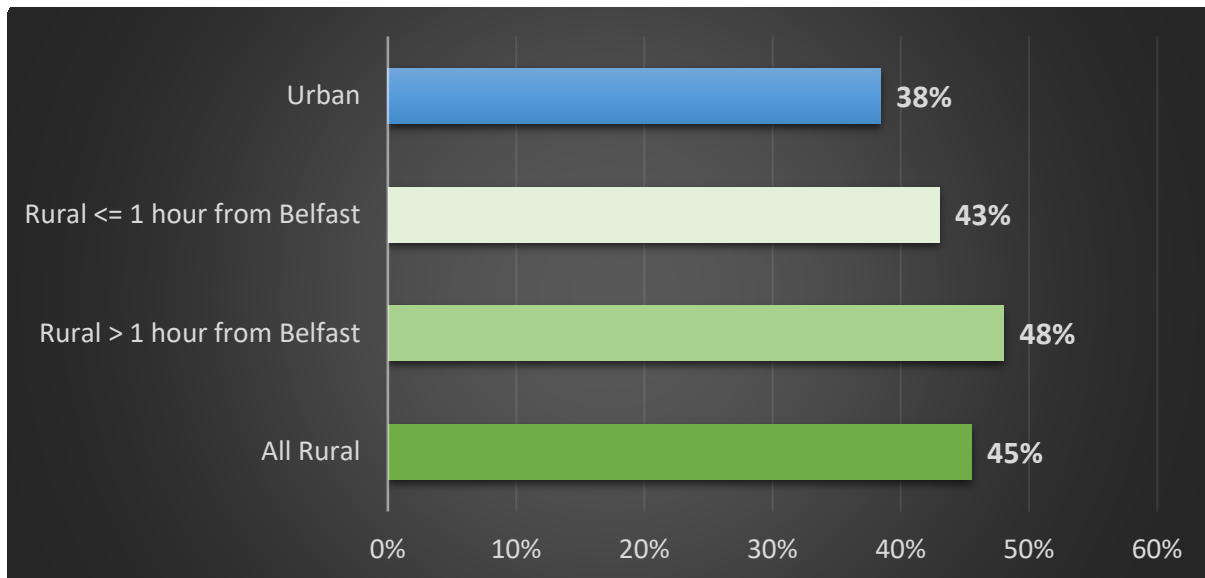


Note: Based on those scoring 9-10 on the question: 'Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'.

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Population Survey, 2019/20

The 2019/20 ONS Annual Population survey found that people living in rural areas were consistently more likely to report high happiness levels (44% compared to 36% in urban areas, Figure 29) and high life satisfaction (40% compared to 34% in urban areas, Figure 30). Similarly, rural dwellers were more likely to report lower anxiety levels than their urban counterparts (45% to 38%, Figure 31). These findings largely mirrored the results of the 2018-19 survey.

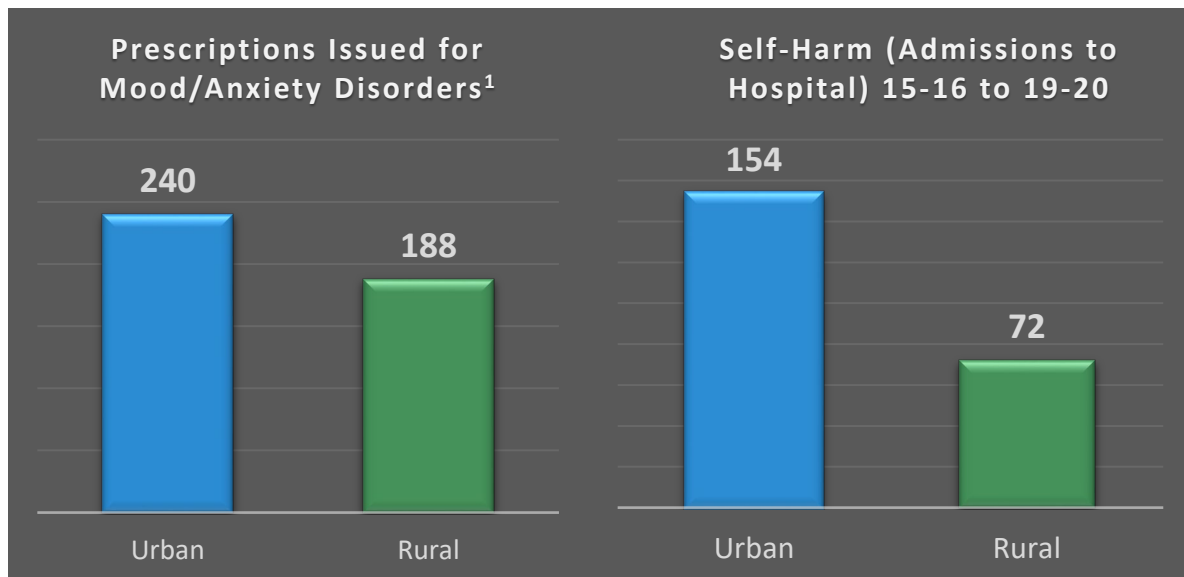
Figure 31: Self-Reported 'Low' Anxiety, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019-20



Note: Based on those scoring 0-1 on the question: 'Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious'.

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Population Survey, 2019/20

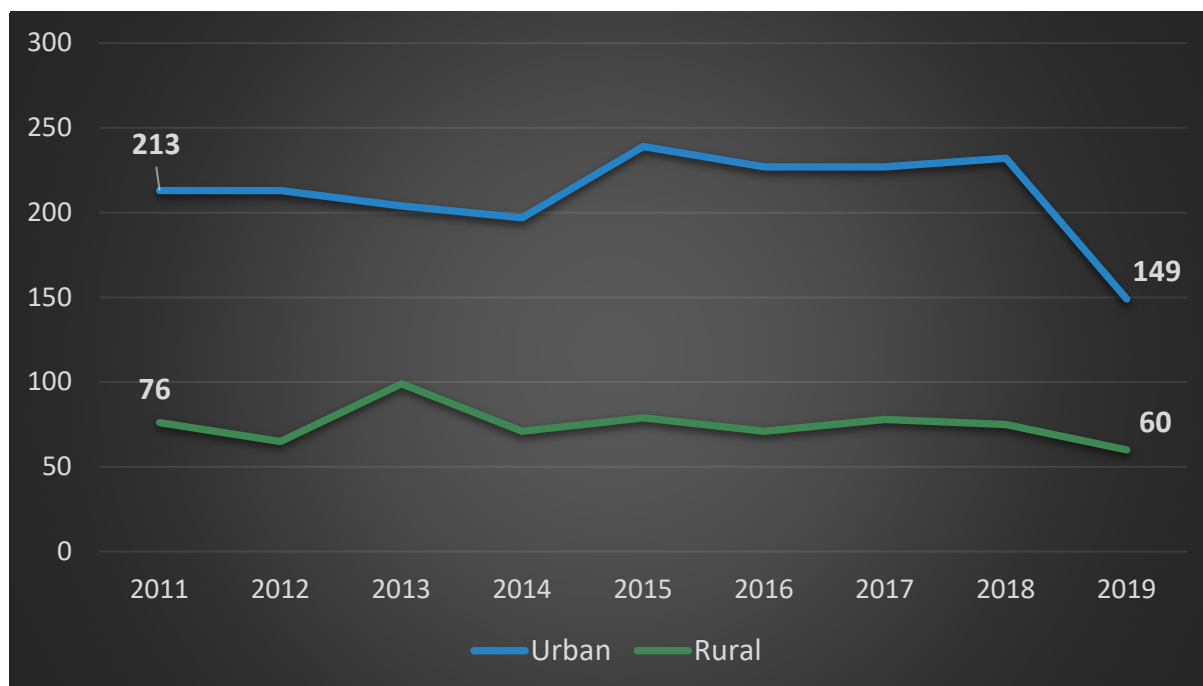
Figure 32: Prescriptions Issued for Mood Disorders (2019), Hospital Admissions for Self-Harm (to 2019-20), Urban/Rural Comparison



Notes: 1. Persons prescribed per 1,000 population, 2. Per 100,000 population

Source: Health Inequalities Monitoring Report 2021, Department of Health (DoH)

Figure 33: Number of Deaths Registered by Suicide in Northern Ireland, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2011-19



Note: All deaths data supplied by NISRA Vital Statistics Unit is based on the year of registration rather than the year of occurrence unless otherwise stated. Events such as suicide are likely to be referred to the coroner. This can take some time, therefore deaths recorded each year may have occurred prior to the registration year.

Source: NISRA Vital Statistics Unit (DoF), 2020

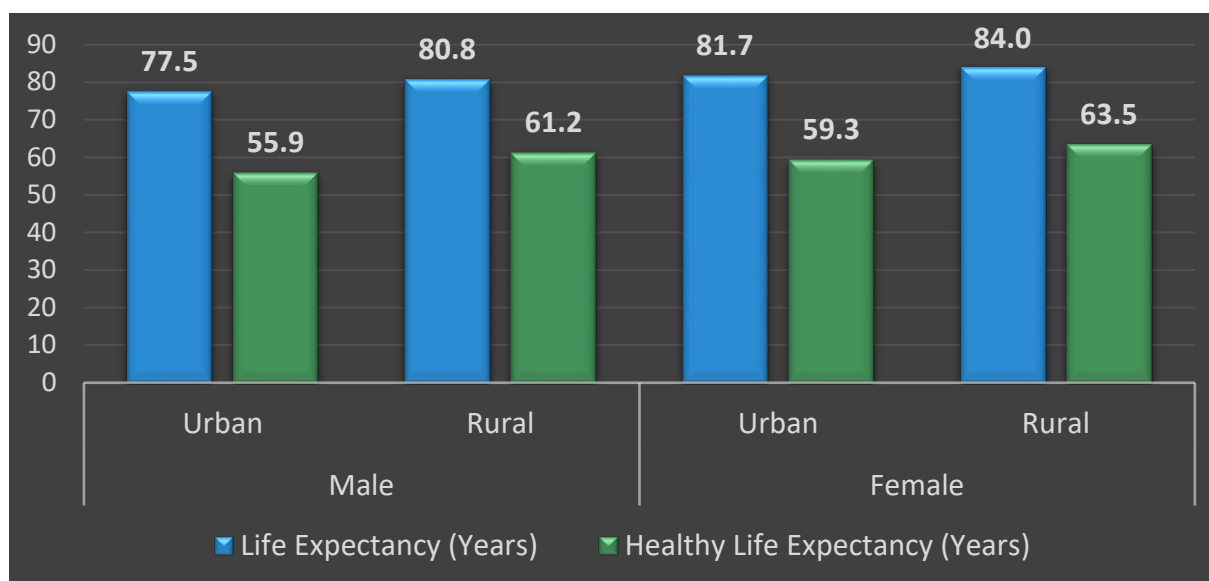
Up to 2019-20, the rate of hospital admissions due to self-harm in rural areas is less than half that in urban areas (Figure 32). Similarly, the number of prescriptions issued for medications to treat mood and anxiety disorders (per 1,000 population) in rural areas, is lower than in urban areas by a factor of almost a quarter (22%).

Fewer deaths are registered by suicide in rural areas, with the number of registered suicides in rural areas declining by almost a quarter (22%) between 2011 and 2019 (Figure 33).

On the surface, these figures suggest that the rural population benefits from better mental health overall. However it must also be considered that not all individuals with mental health difficulties seek treatment, and difficulties with access, reporting, and proximity to mental health services could potentially contribute to the lower figures in rural communities.



Figure 34: Life Expectancy at Birth, and 'Healthy' Life Expectancy<sup>1</sup> (Years), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2017-19



1. This is the average number of years a person can expect to live in good health. HLE provides an estimate of lifetime spent in 'Very Good' or 'Good' health, calculated using respondents' perception of their own health according to the Health Survey Northern Ireland (HSNI).

Source: Health Inequalities Monitoring Report 2021, Department of Health (DoH)

Health inequalities monitoring data (covering 2017-19) suggests that life expectancy is notably higher in rural areas, than in towns and cities in NI. Males living in rural areas can, on average, expect to live just over three years longer, and females over two years longer, than their urban counterparts.

This disparity is further emphasised in the projected 'healthy' years of life – males can expect over five years more 'healthy' years of life, and females over four years more on average, than urban dwellers (Figure 34).

Table 2: Median Emergency Service (Ambulance and Fire) Response Times (Minutes and Seconds), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2016-20

Ambulance	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Urban	00:08:09	00:08:46	00:11:32	00:13:14	00:15:01
Rural	00:15:34	00:16:08	00:18:15	00:20:33	00:22:34
Fire Service	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Urban	00:07:27	00:06:52	00:07:00	00:07:02	00:07:04
Rural	00:08:32	00:13:54	00:14:11	00:14:36	00:14:09

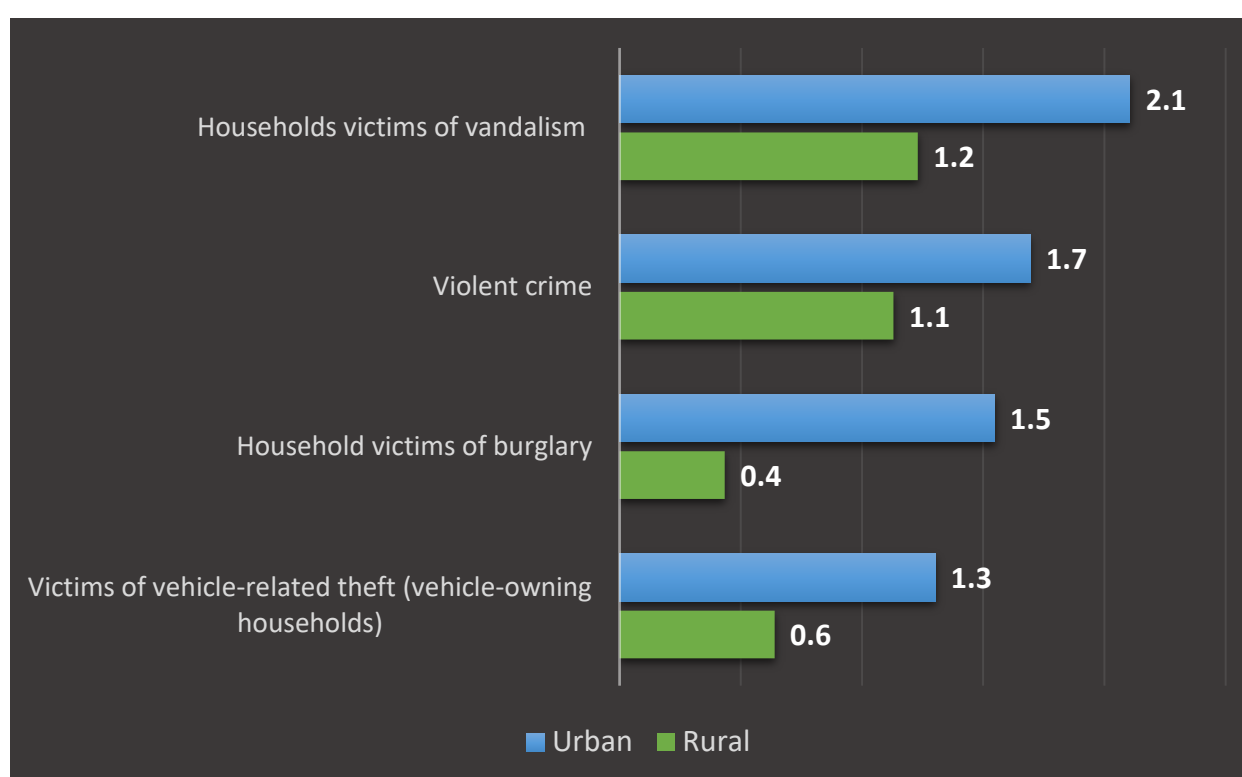
Source: Health Inequalities Monitoring Report 2021, Department of Health (DoH)

In terms access to emergency services, ambulance and fire service response times are substantially longer in rural than in urban areas (Table 2). Average response times for ambulances in particular have been climbing, in both urban and rural areas, between 2016 and 2020.

In 2020, people living in rural areas wait on average around 7 and a half minutes longer for an ambulance, and just over seven minutes longer for fire service response, than those living in towns and cities.

## Crime

Figure 35: NI Crime Victimization Rates (as % of those surveyed), Urban/Rural Comparison 2019-20

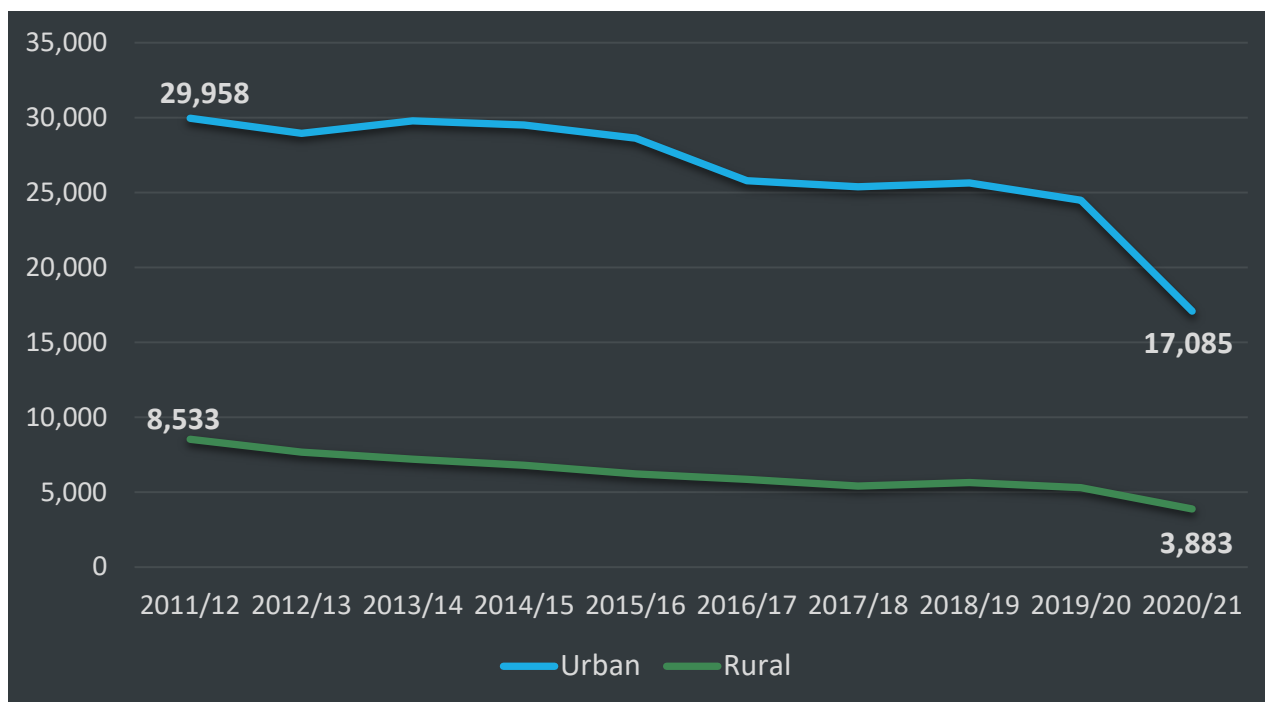


\* Bases for vehicle-related theft will be lower as they are based on vehicle owners only.

Source: NI Safe Community Survey (DoJ), 2020

The 2020 NI Safe Community Survey results suggest that people living in urban areas are much more likely to experience certain types of crime than their rural counterparts, although the proportion of those surveyed experiencing each crime type was generally low. Urban residents were almost twice as likely to experience acts of vandalism, almost four times more likely to experience domestic burglary, and more than twice as likely to experience vehicle-related theft, than those living in rural areas (Figure 35).

Figure 36: Trends in Burglary, Robbery and Theft Offences, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2011/12 to 2020/21

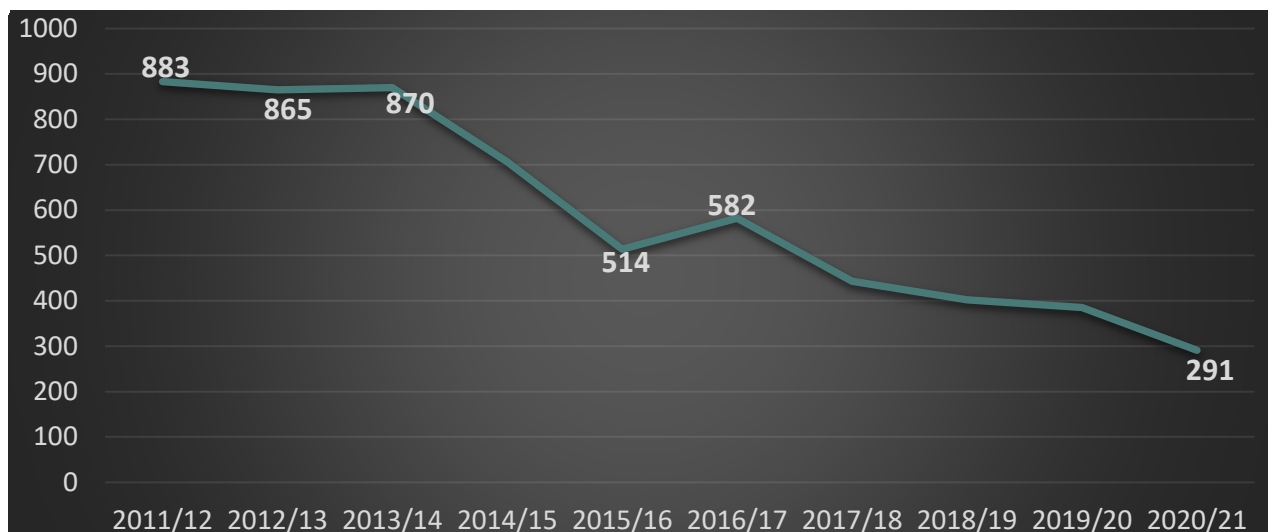


Source: *Agricultural and Rural Crime in NI Bulletin (PSNI), March 2021*

There has been a steady decline in the numbers of recorded burglary, robbery and theft offences in NI overall since 2011/12. The rate of decrease has slowed since 2016/17 but decreased markedly between 2019/20, and 2020/21 in both rural, and especially urban areas, potentially due to limits on outside activity as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

Between 2011/12 and 2020/21 the number of burglary, robbery and theft offences recorded in rural areas, as a proportion of the NI total, fell from 22% to 19% (Figure 37).

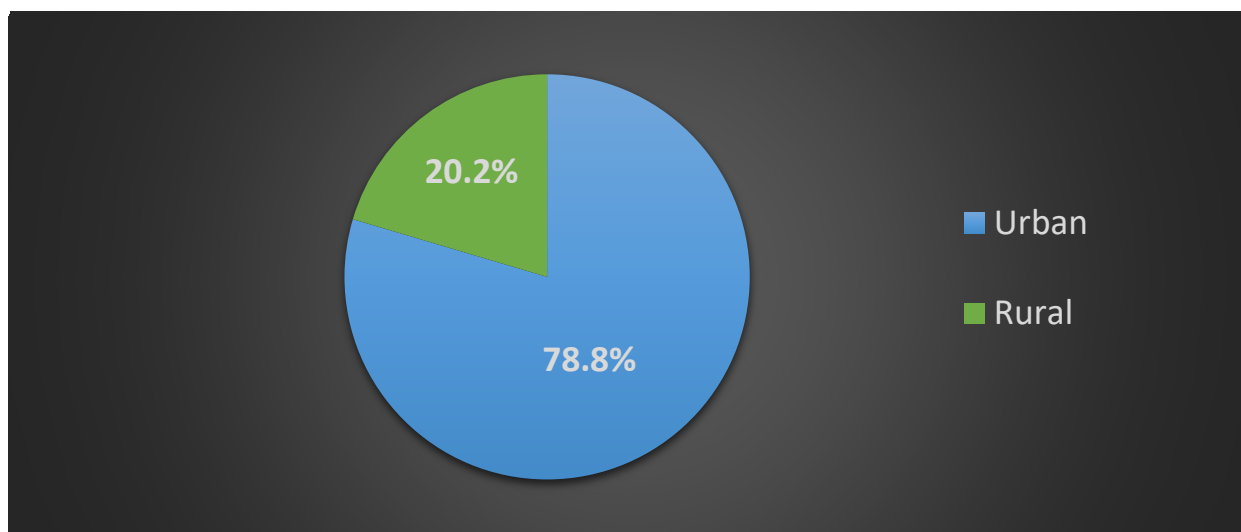
Figure 37: NI Trends in Agriculture Crime (Burglary, Robbery and Theft Offences for Agricultural-based Activity), 2011/12 to 2020/21



Source: *Agricultural and Rural Crime in NI Bulletin, PSNI (March) 2021*

Over approximately the same time period (2011/12 to 2020/21), the numbers of recorded offences relating to agricultural crime (burglary, robbery and theft offences from agricultural premises) has declined by around two thirds, from 883 in 2011/12, to 291 in 2020/21 (Figure 37). It should be noted however, that agriculture-related crimes do not occur exclusively in rural areas.

Figure 38: Police Recorded Crime (all offences), NI Urban/Rural Split\*, 2020

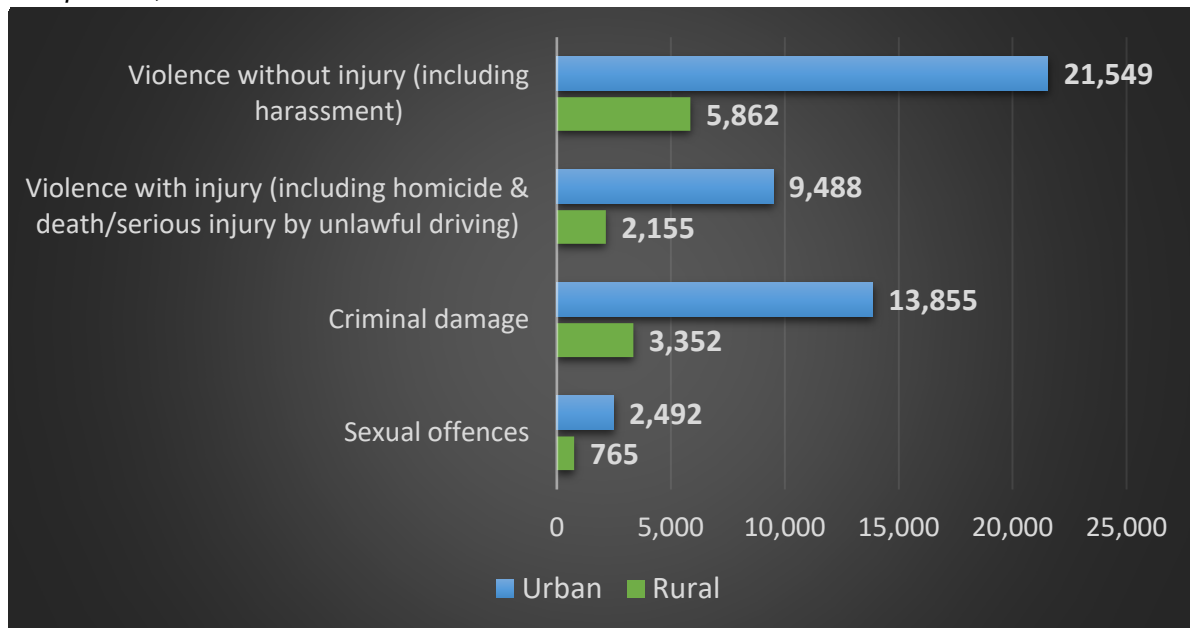


\*1% of cases could not be allocated an urban/rural classification due to missing postcode

Source: PSNI, 2021

The 2020 Police Recorded Crime statistics from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) revealed that more than three quarters (80.3%) of all recorded offences occurred in urban areas, with 20.2% of all recorded offences occurring in rural areas, a slight increase from 18.8% in 2019 (Figure 38).

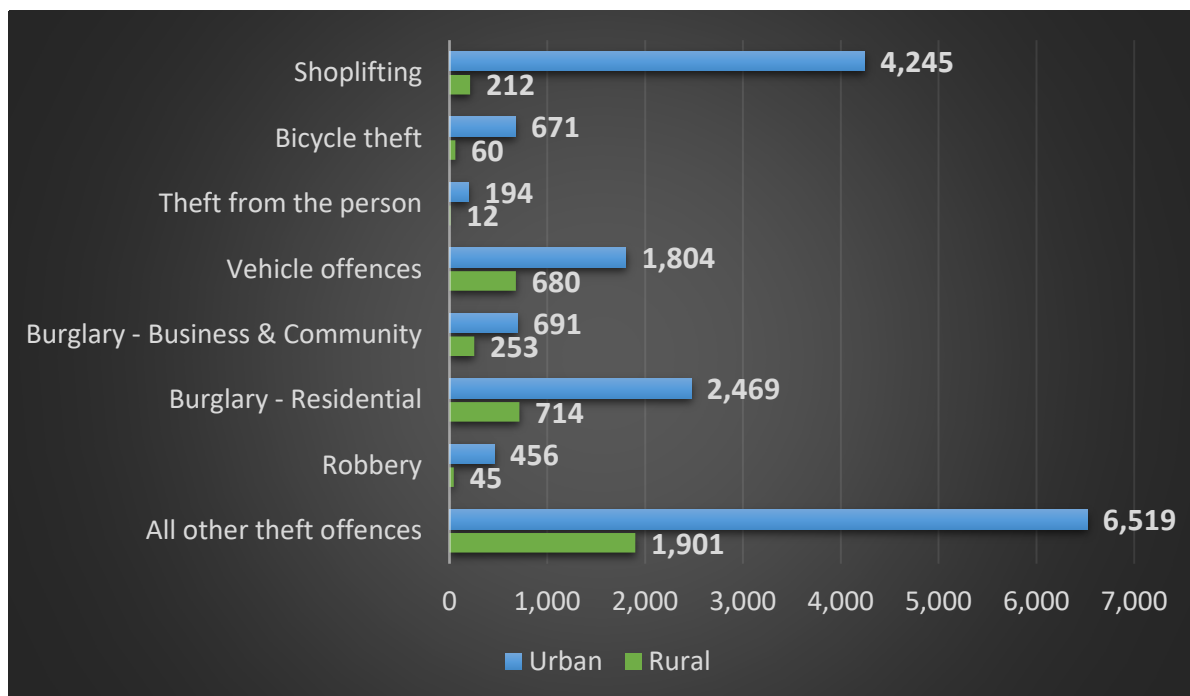
Figure 39: Police Recorded Crime (violent crime, criminal damage and sexual offences, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2020)



Source: PSNI, 2020

Violent crimes, criminal damage and sexual offences, are much more likely to be recorded in urban areas. In 2020, the numbers of recorded offences in these categories mirror the overall urban/rural split – with approximately five times as many offences recorded in urban areas. The gap narrows slightly in terms of sexual offences, where just over three quarters (76%) were recorded in urban areas (Figure 39).

Figure 40: Police Recorded Crime (Robbery, Burglary and Theft Offences), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2020

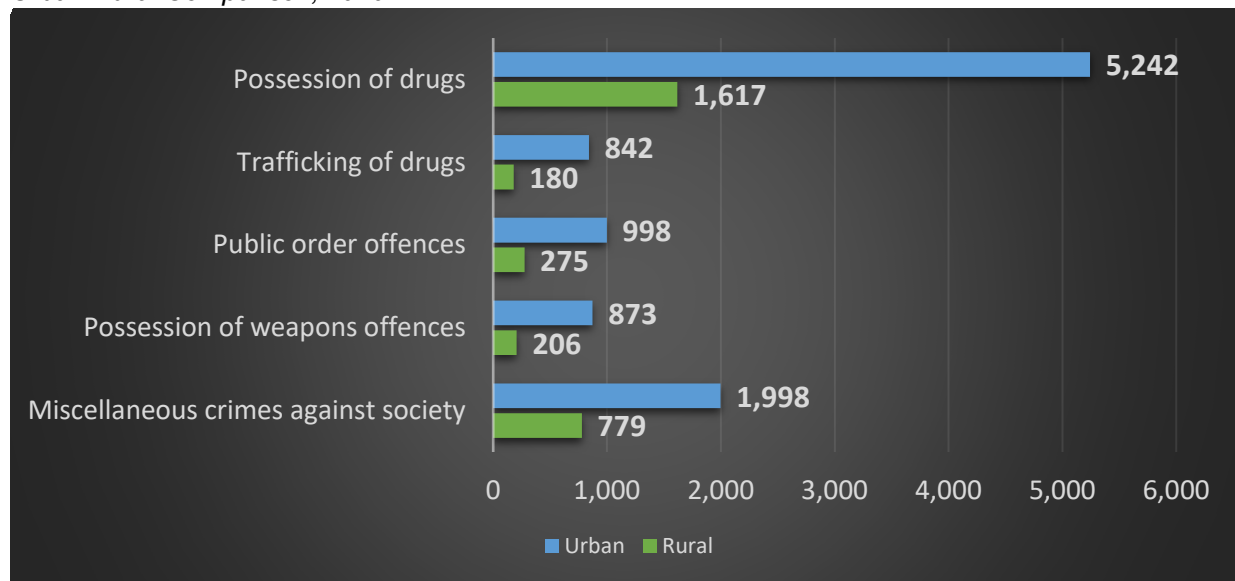


Source: PSNI, 2020

Robbery, burglary and theft offences were substantially more likely to be recorded in urban areas in 2020 (Figure 40). Shoplifting offences in urban areas dwarfed the total for rural areas, with 95% of these occurring in urban areas.

This gap narrowed with respect to vehicle offences (73% to 27%), and all burglary types (69% to 31%). It is important to note that the total number of recorded offences in each sub-category has decreased substantially from 2019 to 2020 (with Covid-19 restrictions likely to have had a bearing on this), with the exception of rural bicycle thefts, which almost doubled from 37 in 2019, to 60 in 2020.

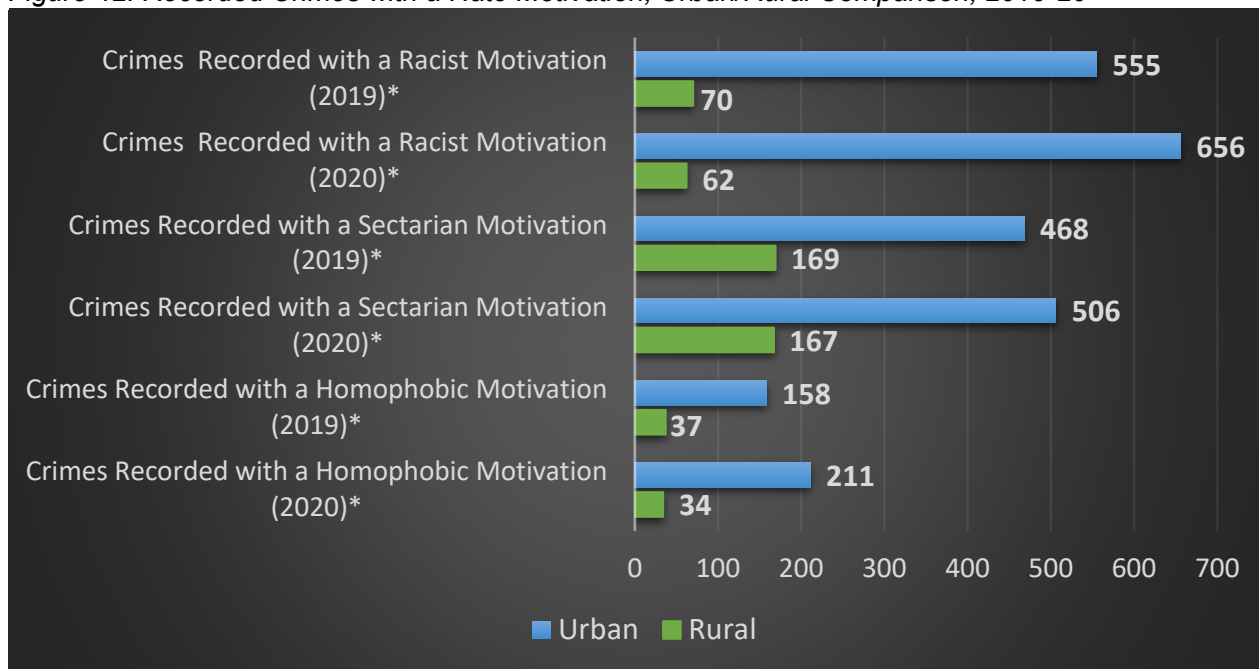
Figure 41: Police Recorded Crime (Drugs, Weapons, Public Order and Miscellaneous Offences), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2020



Source: PSNI, 2020

Recorded offences for drugs, weapon possession, public order and miscellaneous crimes again show a strong affinity with urban areas, however, almost a quarter (24%) of drug possession offences occurred in rural areas (Figure 41).

Figure 42: Recorded Crimes with a Hate Motivation, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019-20



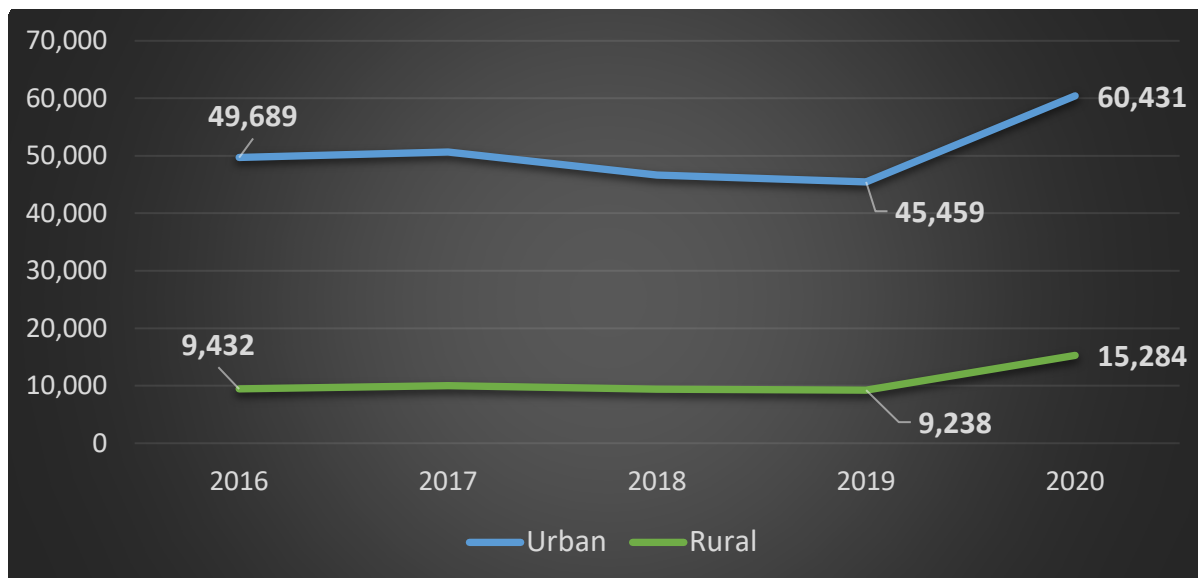
\*excluding fraud

Source: PSNI, 2020

Hate crime remains a significant issue in NI society. An urban/rural comparison of the number of recorded offences with a racist, sectarian or homophobic motivation reveals an increase for all three types offences in urban areas between 2019 and 2020 (with a 15% in racially motivated crimes, and a 25% increase in crimes with a homophobic motivation), but a marginal decrease for all three types in rural areas over the same period (Figure 42).



Figure 43: Recorded Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Incidents, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2016-20

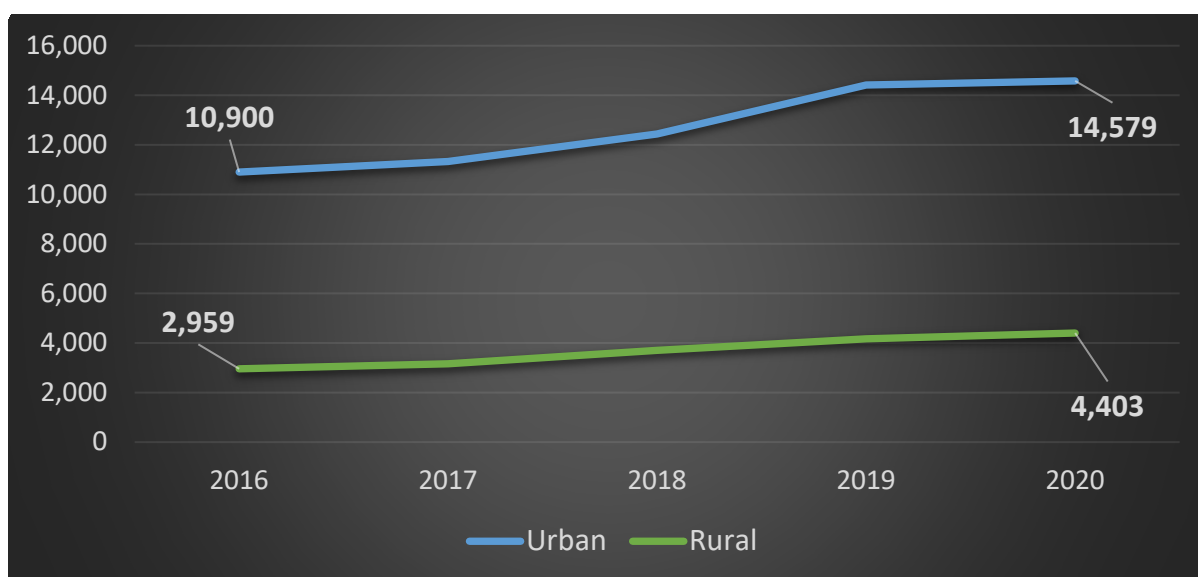


Source: PSNI, 2020

The number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents recorded by PSNI had seen a decline in both urban and rural areas since 2017 (Figure 43). While the vast majority (80%) of these incidents did occur in urban areas in 2020, they are not an exclusively urban phenomenon. The rate of recorded ASB incidents in 2020 however, demonstrated a marked increase from 2019 in both urban (25%), and rural areas (40%).

Conversely, the number of crimes recorded with a domestic abuse motivation has increased markedly over the five year period 2016-20 in both urban and rural areas. The urban increase has been pronounced (25%), but the increase in rural areas has been even more apparent over the same period (33% - Figure 44).

Figure 44: Crimes Recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2016-20

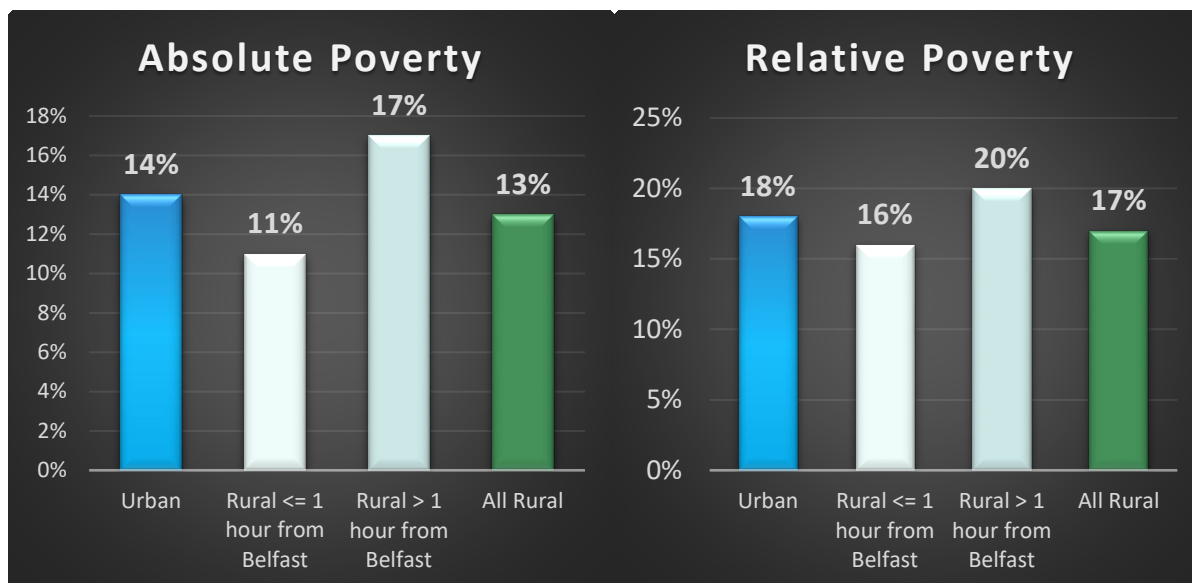


Source: PSNI, 2020

## Household Income, Housing and Poverty

Rural households are just as likely as those in urban areas to fall below either relative or absolute poverty levels. However, overall figures for rural areas disguise intra-rural differences in the experience of poverty. In 2019-20, poverty levels in households in rural areas which are more than an hour's journey from Belfast were higher than those of rural areas closer to the city (Figure 45).

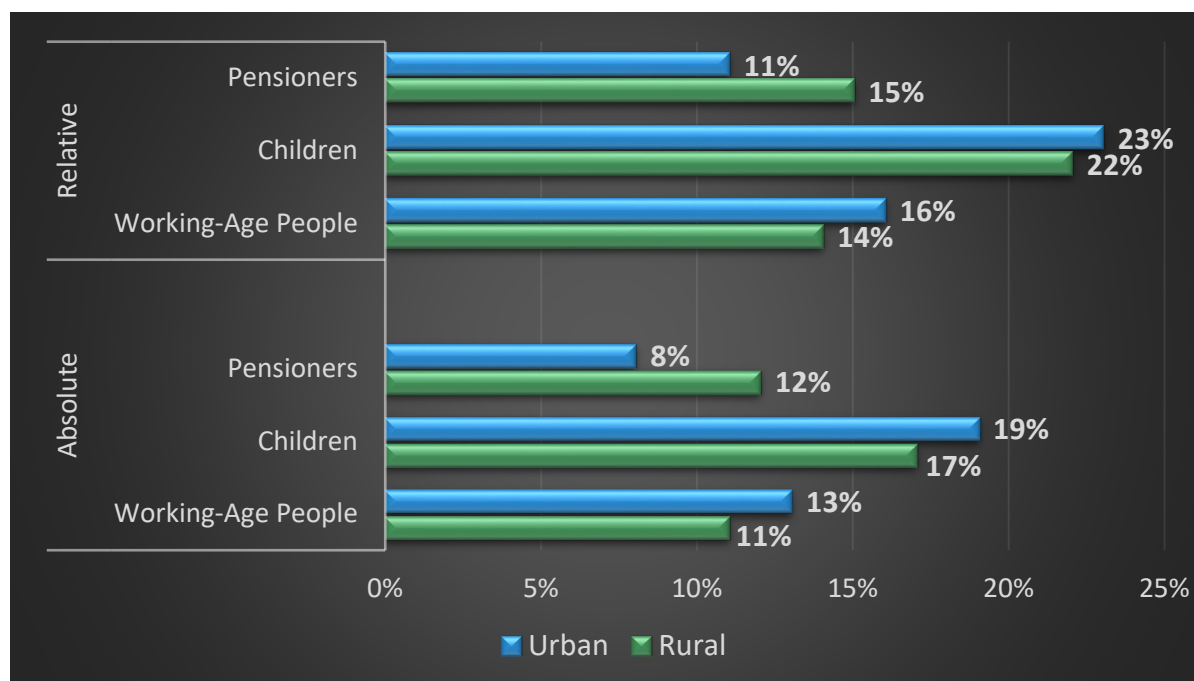
Figure 45: Proportion of Households in Poverty (after Housing Costs), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019/20



Source: Households Below Average Income (HBAI), Department for Communities (DfC), 2019/20

Poverty levels in both the 'children' and 'adults of working age' groups were very similar in urban and rural areas as a whole. However, the reverse is true for pensioners. Rural pensioners were substantially more likely to be in relative or absolute poverty than their urban counterparts (Figure 46).

Figure 46: Proportion of Individuals in Poverty (after Housing costs), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019/20



Source: Households Below Average Income (HBAI), DfC, 2019/20

Table 3: Social Welfare Benefit Claimants/Recipients, Urban/Rural Comparison, May 2021

	DLA Recipients	PIP Claims in Payment	ESA Recipients	Carer's Allowance Recipients	Income Support Claimants	Pension Credit Claimants	Universal Credit Claimants
<b>Urban</b>	49,650	108,180	76,820	32,620	14,420	40,530	85,240
<b>Rural</b>	24,400	47,720	30,970	15,580	4,560	22,860	31,550
<i>Missing Postcode</i>	250	680	190	100	90	70	857
<b>NI Total</b>	74,310	156,580	107,970	48,300	18,890	63,460	117,647

All figures except Universal Credit have been rounded to the nearest ten. Totals may not sum due to rounding. In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to a LGD or as Urban/Rural on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated using this method, and some cannot be allocated at all.

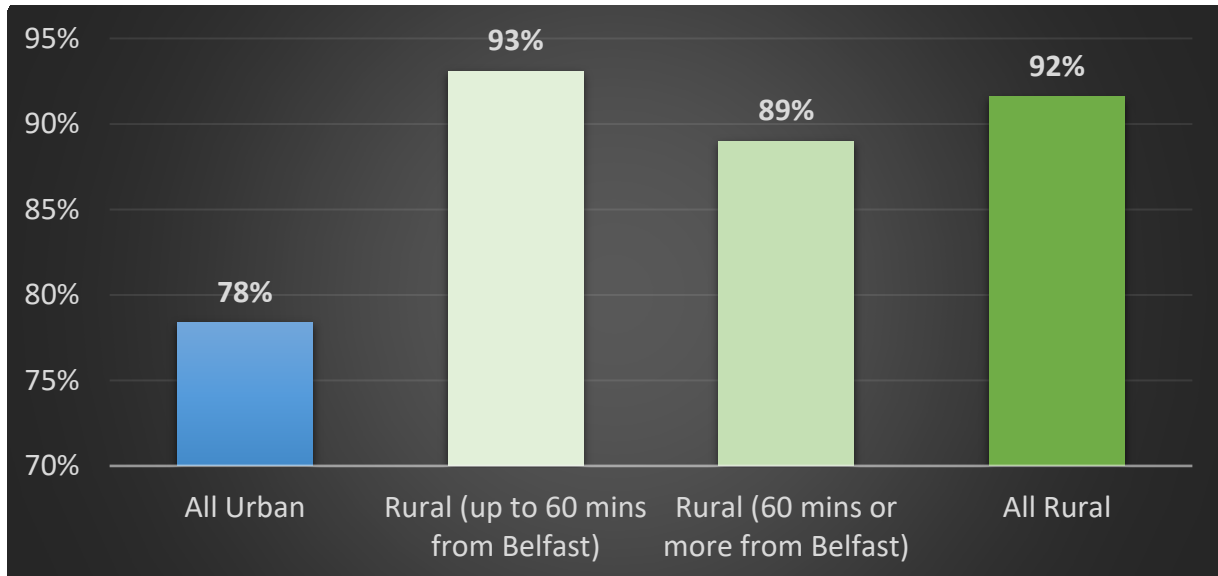
Source: Professional Services Unit (PSU), Department for Communities, 2021

The economic impact of Covid-19 has been evident in both urban and rural areas. Job losses have resulted in a huge increase in the number of Universal Credit (UC) claimants, with the NI total more than doubling between 2020 and 2021.

The number of rural dwellers claiming UC almost tripled, from 13,621 in February 2020, to 31,550 in May 2021, an increase of 132%.

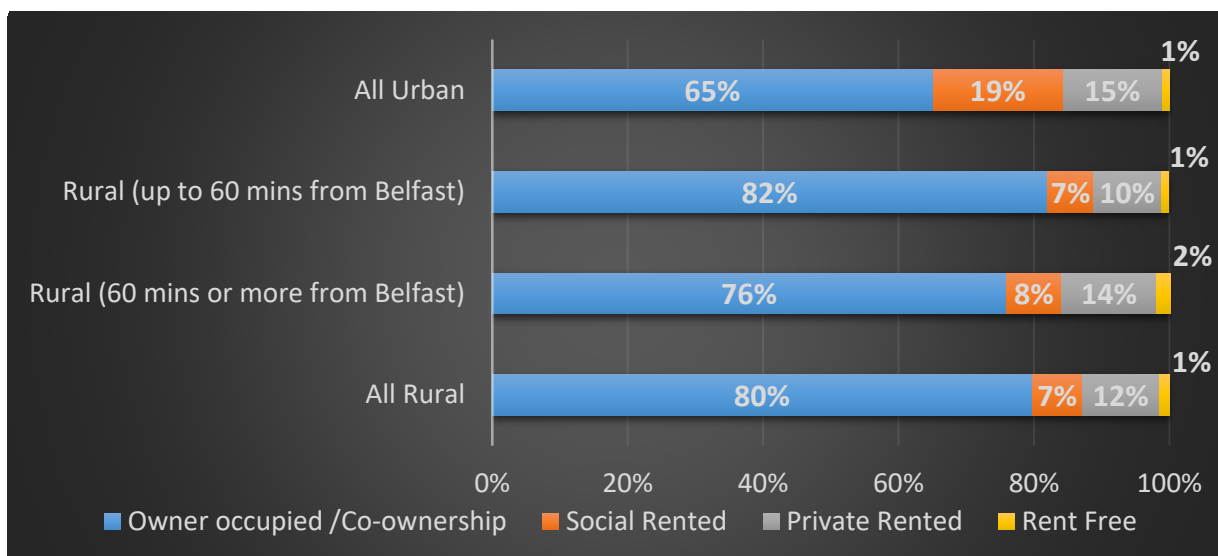
The cost of living is also higher in rural areas<sup>7</sup> and the 2016 NI House Condition Survey carried out by the NI Housing Executive suggests that almost a third (32%) of rural households experience fuel poverty compared to 16% of those in urban areas.<sup>8</sup> Private transport is also a necessity in many rural areas in terms of access to employment and basic services – 92% of rural households had access to at least one car or van in 2019/20 (Figure 47). As a result, vehicle ownership and running costs may consume a greater share of available household income.

Figure 47: Household Car/Van Ownership, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019/20



Source: Continuous Household Survey, 2019/20, NISRA

Figure 48: Housing Tenure, Urban/Rural Comparison, 2019/20



Source: Continuous Household Survey 2019/20, NISRA

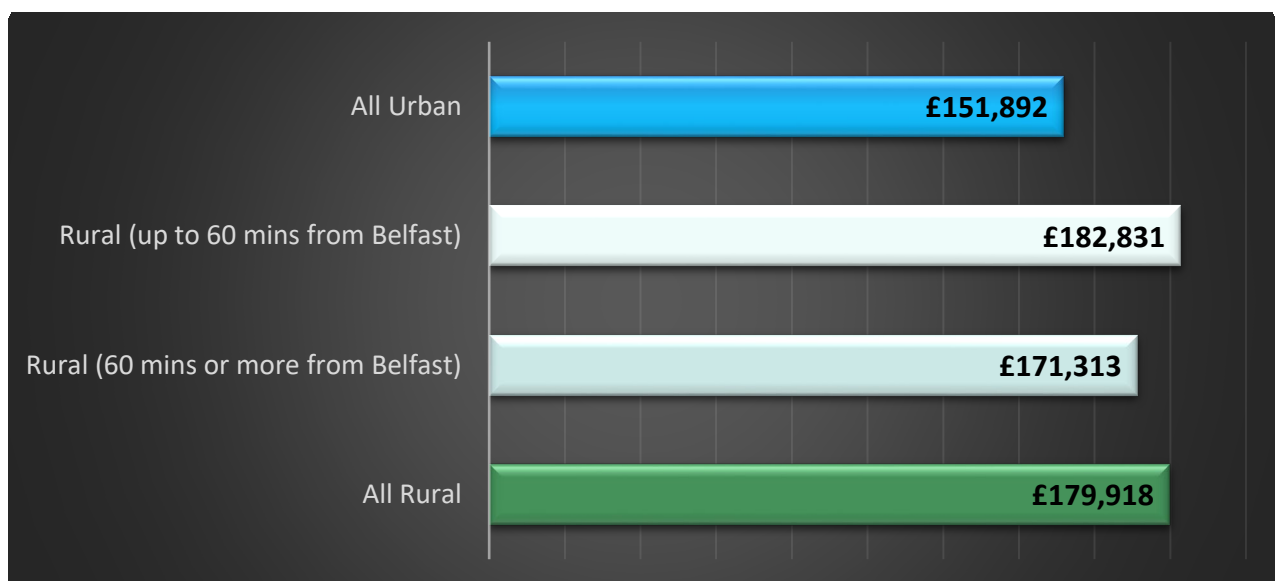
<sup>7</sup>A minimum income standard for rural areas, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010

<sup>8</sup>Northern Ireland House Condition Survey 2016, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, 2018

Access to social housing is much more limited, and rates of owner-occupation are substantially higher in rural (80%) than urban areas (65% - Figure 48). As of Quarter 3 in 2021, average house prices are also higher in rural than in urban areas, with property in rural areas within an hour's drive of Belfast most expensive of all (Figure 49).

This trend will doubtless be exacerbated due to higher demand for properties in rural areas as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, although a combination of high demand and relatively low supply continues to drive prices upward in both urban and rural areas.

Figure 49: Average House Prices (NI), Urban/Rural Comparison, Q3 2021



Source: NI House Price Index, Land and Property Services (LPS) NISRA, Q3 2021

## Further Information

This publication provides an overview of the wide range of information collected across Government to support the development of rural policy. Further sources of information on rural NI are provided below.

### Rural Statistics and Farmer Equality Indicators

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/rural-statistics-and-farmer-equality-indicators#toc-1>

*Contains information on the farming population and rural/urban comparative data on demography, households below average income, the economy and labour market, earnings, industry, tourism, telecommunications, investment, health, education, housing, travel and transport, wellbeing and experience of crime*

### Rural Development

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/rural-development>

### Rural Needs

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/rural-development/rural-needs>

### ‘Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation’

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/rural-development/tackling-rural-poverty-and-social-isolation>

### Rural Statistics and Farmer Equality Indicators

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/rural-statistics-and-farmer-equality-indicators#toc-1>

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### Rural Development

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/rural-development>

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## Research Reports

Skills, Education and Training: Results from the AFBI farm household survey: Jack, C, Anderson, D, Patten, N and Miller, C, AFBI, 2014

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/skills-education-and-training-results-from-the-afbi-farm-household-survey-2014.pdf>

On-Farm and Off-Farm Returns to Education among Farm Operators in Northern Ireland: A Non-Technical Summary and Policy Discussion Document: Jack, C and Wallace, M, AFBI, 2011

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/returns-to-education-report.pdf>



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