

# Policy Briefing No. 10

## Linking Sustainable Regional Development with the National Well-Being Framework

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May 2023



### WDC Policy Briefings:

The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body promoting economic and social development in the Western Region of Ireland (counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, and Clare). WDC Policy Briefings highlight and provide discussion and analysis of key regional policy issues.

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#### Read more:

McGrath L., 2022. Some Missing Links in Ireland's National Well-Being Framework. *Economic and Social Review*, 53 (4), 299-330.

McGrath, L., Hynes, S., & McHale, J., 2020. Linking Sustainable Development Assessment in Ireland and the European Union with Economic Theory. *Economic and Social Review*, 52 (2), 327-55.

McGrath L., & Hynes S., (2020) Approaches to accounting for our natural capital. *Biology & Environment: Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 120B, 153-74.

McGrath, L., Hynes, S., & McHale, J., 2021. Reassessing Ireland's Economic Development through the Lens of Sustainable Development. *European Review of Economic History*, heab025.

McGrath L., 2022. Natural capital accounting: Using economic theory to "Green" the national accounts and measure sustainable development. Doctoral thesis. [Available here.](#)

## Introduction

The public policy design and evaluation frameworks that guide decision-making will have impacts for regional as well as national economic and social outcomes. In recent years, there has been a concerted global effort to move beyond conventional economic metrics to focus on the more holistic concept of well-being and the interrelated concept of sustainable development (Stiglitz, et al., 2009<sup>1</sup>; 2018).<sup>2</sup> The recent Covid-19 pandemic offers a sharp reminder of the interdependence between our natural environment and our economy as well as the diversity of our regions (Lydon and McGrath, 2020<sup>3</sup>; McGrath, 2021).<sup>4</sup> More holistic measures of progress will be necessary to combat future environmental and developmental risks such as climate change (Polasky et al., 2019).<sup>5</sup>

These issues are salient in Ireland, where traditional metrics have become heavily distorted by globalisation impacts (Dept. of Finance, 2020).<sup>6</sup> The "First Report on a Well-Being Framework for Ireland" (Govt. of Ireland, 2021)<sup>7</sup> and the associated Central Statistics Office (CSO) well-being data hub (CSO, 2022)<sup>8</sup> represent Ireland's first national well-being framework. The well-being framework aims to incorporate broader measures of progress for use in policymaking and evaluation.

This Western Development Commission (WDC) Policy Briefing focuses on strengthening the national well-being framework concerning two key missing links whose omission threatens to weaken the framework's coherence. The first is the lack of clarity surrounding the concept of sustainable development. The second is a lack of regional integration that threatens to distort policy choices regarding regional development. Considerations for the future development of the national well-being framework are presented through an amended dashboard, a suite of suggested indicators at a more disaggregated regional level that intersects relevant well-being themes and a practical policy application to the monitoring of the goals of the National Planning Framework.

<sup>1</sup> Stiglitz, J., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J. 2009. Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress.

<sup>2</sup> Stiglitz, J., Fitoussi, J., & Durand, M. 2018, Beyond GDP: Measuring What Counts for Economic and Social Performance, OECD Publishing, Paris,

<sup>3</sup> Lydon, R. & McGrath, L., 2020. Regional impact of COVID-19, Economic Letters 10/EL/20, Central Bank of Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> McGrath L., 2021. Regional Economic Impact of COVID-19, Western Development Commission Report.

<sup>5</sup> Polasky P., Kling C., Levin, S., Carpenter S., Daily, G., Ehrlich, P., Heal, G., & Lubchenko J. 2019. Role of economics in analysing the environment and sustainable development, PNAS Working Paper 12, 116,

<sup>6</sup> Department of Finance. 2020. Wellbeing and the Measurement of Broader Living Standards in Ireland.

<sup>7</sup> Government of Ireland, 2021. First Report on a Well-Being Framework for Ireland.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wbhub/well-beinginformationhub/>

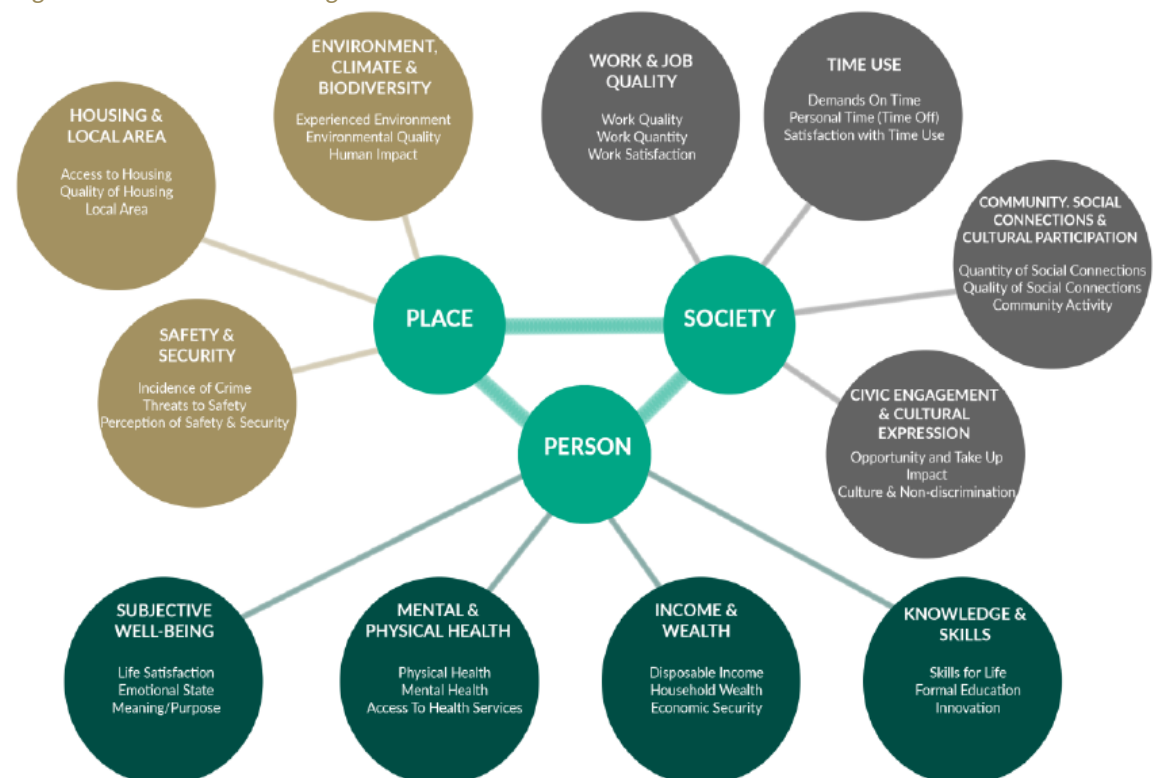
## Overview of Ireland’s Well-Being Framework

The national well-being framework is based on 11 themes;

- Income & wealth
- Knowledge, skills & innovation
- Mental & physical health
- Subjective well-being
- Safety & security
- Housing & the built environment
- Environment, climate & biodiversity
- Work & job quality
- Time use
- Community, social connections & community participation
- Civic engagement & cultural expression.

The initial version of the framework is illustrated in Figure 1 and the corresponding indicators under each theme are presented in Table 1 (page 3). The themes and indicators are discussed throughout the briefing. Table 1 also emphasises the lack of spatial disaggregation which is discussed in detail in the section titled “Regional Integration” starting on page 9. **The reader should note that it will be useful to compare Table 1 with the other tables contained in the briefing.** The proceeding sections discuss some key missing links that threaten to weaken the coherence of the well-being framework before offering considerations for future development.

Figure 1. National Well-Being Framework



Source: Government of Ireland (2021)

The initial version of the framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

The proceeding sections discuss some key missing links that threaten to weaken the coherence of the well-being framework before offering considerations for future development.

Table 1 presents the indicators under each theme within the national well-being framework.

The reader should note that it will be useful to compare Table 1 with the other tables contained in the briefing.

Table 1 emphasises a lack of spatial disaggregation which is discussed in detail in the section titled “Regional Integration”.

Table 1. National Well-Being Framework: Indicators

National Well-Being Framework: Initial Indicators		
Theme	Indicator	Regional Breakdown?
Income & Wealth	Median Real Household Income	No
	Median Household Net Wealth	No
	Households Making Ends Meet with great difficulty (self-reported)	No
Work & Job Quality	Labour Underutilisation Rate	No
	Employment Rate	No
	Mean Weekly Earnings	No
Housing & Local Area (since renamed Housing & the Built Environment)	New Dwelling Completions	Urban/Rural
	BER Rating	No
	Distance to Everyday Services	Urban/Rural
	At Risk of Poverty Rate after Rent & Mortgage Interest	No
Mental & Physical Health	Healthy Life Years at birth	No
	Pop. Reporting Depression (self-reported)	No
	Unmet need for Medical Attention (self-reported)	No
Time Use	Long Working Hours in Main Job	No
	Carers providing at Least 20 Hours Care per Week	No
	Population satisfied with Time Use	No
Knowledge & Skills (since renamed Knowledge, Skills & Innovation)	PISA Scores	No
	Lifelong Learning Rate	No
	Research & Development Personnel	No
Safety & Security	Murder Rate per 100,000 Population	No
	Persons Killed or Injured on Roads	County Level
	Population who worry they could be a Victim of a Crime (self-reported)	No
Community, Social Connections & Cultural Participation	Pop. who Feel Lonely (self-reported)	No
	Pop. with at least 2 people they are close enough to count on if they had a serious problem	No
Civic Engagement & Cultural Expression	Persons who Experienced Discrimination in the Previous 2 Years	No
	Satisfaction with How Democracy Works in Ireland	No
	Perceived Social Inclusion	No
Environment, Climate & Biodiversity	Pollution, Grime & oth. Environmental Problems	No
	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	No
	Waste to Landfill	No
	Water Bodies assessed as High or Good	No
Subjective Well-Being	Population Rating their Overall Life Satisfaction as High	No
	Pop. who did not Feel Depressed/Downhearted in the Last month	No
	School aged Children who report being Happy with their Life	No

Source: CSO (2022). Note: Regional breakdown refers to whether any regional breakdown is provided within the well-being data hub. As noted above, some indicators are spatially disaggregated and reported elsewhere by the CSO.

The international literature emphasises a distinction between current and future well-being.

Current well-being is determined by factors such as the consumption of goods and services. Sustainable development involves sustaining (ideally enhancing) future well-being opportunities.

Meshing current and future well-being together, as is the case in the Irish well-being framework, may lead to confusing messages.

## Sustainable Development & Well Being

A fundamental issue with the well-being framework is the lack of clarity surrounding the concept of sustainable development. The international literature emphasises a clear distinction between the well-being of today's citizens (current well-being) and intergenerational well-being (future well-being). Current well-being is determined by factors such as the consumption of goods/services and environmental/cultural amenities. Sustainable development involves sustaining (ideally enhancing) well-being opportunities for future generations. It is the current generation's use of the assets that ultimately produce flows of future well-being, the stocks of natural, physical, social, and human capital, and the extent of technological progress and institutional quality, that determines future well-being opportunities (Dasgupta, 2021).<sup>9</sup>

The link between broadly defined capital assets and future well-being provides the theoretical foundations for the capital approach to sustainable development (Dasgupta, 2021). This capital approach was central to the Council of European Statisticians (CES) recommendations on measuring sustainable development (UNECE/Eurostat/OECD, 2014)<sup>10</sup>. The CES framework offers "an endorsed and universal framework for measuring sustainable development combining a strong theoretical basis and a clear link with policy needs" (UNECE, 2016).<sup>11</sup> The CES framework emphasises three dimensions of well-being:

- **Current well-being:** the well-being of the current generation in a country.
- **Future well-being:** the well-being of future generations based on the capital assets that are a precondition for well-being.
- **Transboundary impacts:** the well-being of people living in other countries.

In contrast, Ireland's framework cited difficulties in the assumptions surrounding the relevant trade-offs and trying not to complicate the framework as reasons to mesh current and future well-being together (Govt. of Ireland 2021). Meshing current and future well-being risks distorting policy choices and evaluation. For example, the current generation may boost current well-being by degrading stocks of natural capital assets that will have negative future impacts. A key reason to distinguish between future well-being from current well-being is to avoid short-sighted policymaking. Stiglitz et al. (2009) summarise the issue;

*The assessment of sustainability [future well-being] is complementary to the question of current well-being... and must be examined separately. This may sound trivial and yet it deserves emphasis, because some existing approaches fail to adopt this principle, leading to potentially confusing messages. For instance, confusion may arise when one tries to combine current well-being and sustainability [future well-being]... (Stiglitz et al., 2009).*

<sup>9</sup> Dasgupta, P., 2021. The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review (HM Treasury, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> UNECE, Eurostat, OECD., 2014. CES Recommendations on Measuring Sustainable Development. New York/Genève: UN.

<sup>11</sup> UNECE, 2016. Interim report on Adjusting the CES Recommendations on Measuring Sustainable Development to SDGs: New York/Genève: United Nations.

The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) framework represents international best practices regarding the measurement of sustainable development.

The CES well-being dimensions (current; future & transboundary) are linked to 20 policy-relevant themes to monitor current well-being and the environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainable development.

The reader can compare Table 2 with Table 1 for an illustration of the differences between the Irish framework and the CES framework.

The CES framework offers a theoretical base that can be harnessed to build a coherent well-being/sustainable development framework. The CES approach links the three well-being dimensions to 20 policy-relevant themes covering current well-being as well as the environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainable development (Table 2). The CES framework offers flexibility in terms of indicator selection across the 20 common themes 1) Conceptual organisation: the 20 themes are organised according to the three well-being dimensions and monitored by 60 suggested indicators. 2) Thematic organisation: a large indicator set including the 60 conceptual indicators and an additional 30 policy-relevant indicators presented according to the 20 themes; and a small set of 24 indicators to communicate the main messages more efficiently to policymakers and the general public.

Table 2. The CES Framework

The conceptual themes of the CES Recommendations		
Dimension	Sub-Dimension	Theme
Current Well-Being		Subjective Well-being Consumption & Income Nutrition Health Labour Education Housing Leisure Physical Safety Land & Ecosystems Water Air Quality Trust Institutions Mobility
Future Well-Being	Economic/Physical Capital	Physical Capital Knowledge Capital Financial Capital <b>Monetary - Economic Capital</b>
	Natural Capital	Energy Resources Mineral Resources Land & Ecosystems Water Air Quality Climate <b>Monetary - Natural Capital</b>
	Human Capital	Labour Education Health <b>Monetary - Human Capital</b>
	Social Capital	Trust Institutions <b>Monetary - Social Capital</b>
Transboundary Impacts	Consumption & Income	Consumption & Income
	Economic/Physical Capital	Physical Capital Knowledge Capital Financial Capital
	Natural Capital	Energy Resources Mineral Resources Land and Ecosystems Water Climate
	Human Capital	Labour
	Social Capital	Institutions

Source: Adapted from UNECE/Eurostat/OECD (2014).

The main difference between the CES framework and Ireland's initial well-being framework is the clarity surrounding the concept of sustainable development.

The CES recommendations also emphasise intragenerational concerns within the current well-being dimension. These concerns may include distributional impacts at the individual and regional levels. Regional integration is discussed from page 10 of this briefing.

The Irish well-being framework could be strengthened further in terms of integrating sustainable development and regional issues.

## Integrating Sustainable Development into the Well-Being Framework

Dept. of Finance (2022)<sup>12</sup> reviewed the well-being framework regarding the concept of sustainability. The review acknowledged the lack of clarity and suggested changes. The framework was amended as detailed in Govt. of Ireland (2022a)<sup>13</sup>, including the tagging of a 14-indicator sustainability subset of the original 35 indicators. An analysis of the framework was also published including a sub-section titled "Understanding Sustainability in Ireland" (Govt. of Ireland, 2022b).<sup>14</sup> These changes are welcome improvements, but further strengthening should be considered.

Firstly, the initial framework focused on current well-being, as the review acknowledges (Dept. of Finance, 2022, Pg 14), thus one might question if a subset of those original indicators represents the best choice to monitor sustainability? For example, 3/14 of the subset could not be scored in the analysis (Govt. of Ireland, 2022b). Furthermore, there remains a lack of natural capital monitoring, arguably the most critical component of future well-being. For example, biodiversity and local air pollution indicators are missing and there are no equivalent indicators/themes to the CES themes of "land & ecosystems", "mineral resources" and "energy resources".

Secondly, the meshing of current and future well-being has remained and appears to be leading to some confusion in the analysis. For example, the executive summary from Govt. of Ireland (2022b) summarises "*...the dashboard paints a generally positive picture..., Ireland performs well in 20 indicators. 6 indicators show negative performance ...the remaining 9 indicators are more nuanced.*" The wider analysis contained in the report is more nuanced and is good overall, but some key messages seem confusing. For example, on page 3, medium-term issues are cited "*Overall, while the dashboard provides a positive picture...specific areas...suggest sustained issues over the medium-term across quality of life, sustainability and equality*". However, the medium-term outlook is puzzlingly found to be positive in the conclusions, on page 23, "*Overall, the dashboard provides a positive picture of the country's medium-term progress*". A more nuanced (and alarming) analysis follows "*the issue of the environment, climate and biodiversity has been highlighted as an area of significant and persistent concern....a sustained and increasingly urgent concern.*"

An alternative analysis might more simply summarise that Ireland, overall, performs well in terms of current well-being indicators but there are question marks over sustainable development. A more nuanced analysis could then follow. Longer-term issues such as environmental sustainability often score badly within meshed sustainability indicator sets where the overall scores may be good (McGrath, Hynes & McHale, 2020).<sup>15</sup> This comes back to the rationale for a clear conceptual distinction of current and future well-being to emphasise longer-term policy issues.

<sup>12</sup>Department of Finance, 2022. Sustainability in the Irish Well-being Framework: A Review.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Ireland, 2022a Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework: Second Report.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Ireland, 2022b. Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Dashboard 2022.

<sup>15</sup> McGrath, L., Hynes, S., and McHale, J., 2020. Linking Sustainable Development Assessment in Ireland and the European Union with Economic Theory. *Economic and Social Review*, 52 (2), 327-355.

The analysis of sustainable development within the well-being framework should be considered carefully to avoid confusion and short-termism.

The choice of themes/indicators particularly in relation to natural capital should be reconsidered and a greater distinction between current and future well-being in the analysis should also be considered.

Dept. of Finance (2022) does discuss the CES framework but confusingly concludes that the Irish framework is similar in structure. This seems strange as the review finds the Irish approach to be at odds with the OECD framework (Dept. of Finance, 2022, Pg. 6) as it meshes current and future well-being. By extension, this makes the Irish framework at odds with the CES framework. The reader can compare Tables 1 & 2 for an illustration of the key differences between the frameworks. In addition to the separation of current and future well-being, the CES framework further emphasises transboundary impacts and intragenerational distributional concerns (e.g., individual/regional) that are also absent from the Irish approach.<sup>16</sup>

The review's assessment of the CES framework seems to stem from confusion over the conceptual versus thematic organisation of the CES framework. Dept. of Finance (2022) notes that the Irish approach is similar to the *thematic organisation* which purportedly does not require a separation of current and future well-being. However, the CES report notes that it is simply the *presentation* of the indicator set that does not distinguish between the well-being dimensions. The themes and indicators that come under the future well-being dimension are still included in the thematic organisation and the actual measurement and analysis of sustainable development still requires this distinction to be made. Page 64 of the CES report makes this clear "*the conceptual and thematic categorizations are derived from the [same] theoretical model... They are simply different ways of presenting the same set of indicators*".<sup>17</sup>

The conceptual organisation offers a clear identification of the well-being dimensions and a recognition of the trade-offs between these dimensions. In addition, this categorisation can help identify potential data gaps in measuring sustainable development. The OECD and the academic literature prefer the conceptual approach (Dept. of Finance, 2022, Pg. 6; Govt. of Ireland 2022b). The advantages of the thematic categorization, as preferred by the Government, are that the terminology is more suited to policymakers and the public, and policy-relevant themes can be incorporated more easily. Under a thematic approach, the analysis of sustainable development needs to be considered carefully to avoid confusion and short-termism. The choice of themes/indicators within the national well-being framework, particularly concerning natural capital, should be reconsidered and a greater distinction between current and future well-being across the main messages of the analysis should be contemplated.<sup>18</sup>

I show below (Table 3), how the well-being framework might be aligned with the CES conceptual approach in a manner that does not overly complicate the framework. The alignment in Table 3 seeks to integrate the concept of sustainable

<sup>16</sup> The lack of regional integration within the national well-being framework is discussed below.

<sup>17</sup> The very same themes and indicators that come under the future well-being dimension are still included in the thematic organisation and the actual measurement and analysis of sustainable development still require this distinction to be made. For example, natural capital is represented implicitly within the thematic organisation through the themes of "Water", "Air Quality", "Climate", "land and ecosystems", "mineral resources" and "energy resources" just as within the conceptual organisation.

<sup>18</sup> Utilising both approaches is endorsed by the CES report "*both the conceptual and thematic categorizations have advantages and disadvantages. To make use of the strong points of both categorization methods, they could be used simultaneously based on the links presented.*" (Pg. 66).

Greater structural changes should also be considered. I show below (Table 3), how to align the well-being framework with the CES Framework.

development in a coherent and accessible manner with the Irish well-being framework. The reader can compare Tables 1 & 3 to clearly observe the amendments.

The amended dashboard contains two well-being dimensions:

1) **Current Well-Being:** consisting of 9 themes:

- Income
- Work & job quality
- Housing & local area
- Mental & physical health
- Leisure & recreation
- Knowledge, skills & innovation
- Inclusion, safety & community
- Environment, climate & biodiversity
- Subjective well-being.

2) **Future Well-Being:** consisting of 4 themes:

- Natural capital
- Economic capital
- Human capital
- Social capital.

Within the initial framework (Table 1) the theme of “income & wealth” represented a clear meshing of the current well-being theme of “income” and the future well-being theme of “wealth” and thus the amended dashboard contains separate themes of “income” and “economic/physical capital”.

Several initial themes were related to various aspects of what the well-being literature considers to be components of “social capital” (safety & security”, “community, social connections & cultural participation” and “civic engagement & cultural expression”). Consequently, within the amended dashboard, I have condensed those themes into “social capital” under the future well-being dimension and “inclusion, safety & community” under the current well-being dimension.

“Time use” was re-named “leisure & recreation” in the amended dashboard to better align with the CES framework. I have also suggested several additional indicators not originally included in the framework, largely surrounding a greater coverage of environmental amenities, natural capital, and regional issues.

Finally, an aggregate future well-being indicator is suggested - the Genuine Savings indicator - a leading economic indicator of sustainable development (Hanley et al., 2015)<sup>19</sup> and is a measure of the monetary sub-components of future well-being as noted within the CES framework (Table 2). The use of such an aggregate indicator is supported under recommendation 11 of Stiglitz et al., (2009).

<sup>19</sup> Hanley, N., Dupuy, L., McLaughlin, E., 2015. Genuine savings and sustainability. J. Econ. Surveys. 29, 779–806.



Table 3 represents an amended well-being dashboard based on the CES framework and can be compared to the initial national framework in Table 1.

“Safety & Security”, “Community, Social Connections & Cultural Participation” and “Civic Engagement & Cultural Expression” are condensed into “Inclusion, Safety & Community” and “Social Capital”.

“Time Use” is renamed “Leisure & Recreation”.

“Income & Wealth” is split between “Income” and “Economic Capital”.

Themes of Natural Capital and Human Capital are also now included.

Table 3. Amended Draft Sustainable Development/Well-Being Framework.

Amended Draft Dashboard based on the CES Framework		
Dimension	Theme	Potential Indicators
Current Well-Being	Income	Median Real Household Disposable Income Households making ends meet with great difficulty Mean Weekly Earnings
	Work and Job Quality	Labour Underutilisation Rate Employment Rate Unemployment Rate
	Housing & Local Area	New Dwelling Completions BER Rating Distance to Everyday Services Housing Affordability Regional Mobility Indicators* NTA Employment accessibility score*
	Mental & Physical Health	Healthy Life Years at birth Pop. Reporting Depression (self-reported) Unmet need for Medical Attention (self-reported) Healthy life years Pop. Share of obesity/smokers/binge drinkers*
	Leisure & Recreation	Long Working Hours in Main Job Carers providing at Least 20 Hours Care per Week % of pop. satisfied with Time Use
	Knowledge, Skills & Innovation	PISA Scores Lifelong Learning Rate Research & Development Personnel Innovation Scorecard*
	Inclusion, Safety & Community	Murder Rate per 100,000 Population Population Rating their Overall Life Satisfaction as High Persons Killed or Injured on Roads Pop. who Feel Lonely (self-reported) Persons who Experienced Discrimination in the Previous 2 Years Perceived Social Inclusion
	Environment, Climate & Biodiversity	Available facilities/local amenities/green spaces to proximity* Air Quality* Water Quality Recycling Biodiversity indicators*
	Subjective Well-being	Population Rating their Overall Life Satisfaction as High
Future Well-Being	Economic/Physical Capital	Gross Capital Formation/Net Capital Formation* Median Household Net Wealth Household Debt*
	Natural Capital	National greenhouse gas emissions ((Mt CO2eq) Tonnes of CO2 equivalent per capita Water Bodies assessed as High or Good Local Air Pollution* Mineral and Energy Resources*
	Human Capital	R&D expenditures* Education Expenditures* Educational Attainment*
	Social Capital	Pop. with at least 2 people they are close enough to count on if they had a serious problem Pop. who did not Feel Depressed or Downhearted in the Last 4 Weeks Pop. who worries they could be a Victim of a Crime (self-reported) Voter Turnout* Satisfaction with How Democracy Works in Ireland Rate of Volunteering*
	Changes in Comprehensive Wealth (Monetary Index)	Genuine Savings Indicator*

Note: a (\*) Denotes an indicator not included in the initial CSO Well-Being Data Hub.

The initial well-being framework is nationally focused. Just three of the indicators contain any regional breakdown

There is a risk that the lack of regional integration may lead to unclear monitoring of progress and a distortion of policy choices in relation to regional development.

## Regional Integration

National development is maximised when regions can harness the assets at their disposal to reach their potential. Using the logic of the framework above, sustainable regional development ultimately depends on interactions between regional assets (such as natural, physical, social, and human capital) and national and local institutional, entrepreneurial, and technological capacity. Sustainable regional development policy should seek to enable regions to harness their assets to promote natural and entrepreneurial ecosystems; to attract skilled, creative, and innovative people; to provide high-quality institutions, cultural and environmental facilities; and to encourage the development of community social networks.

It is important to note that the relationship between sustainable development and regional development is not limited to the contribution which regions and regional actions can make to national development but also relates to how a broader focus on well-being/sustainable development can enhance regional development and equity. For example, resources and the assets on which the green economy depends are often located in more rural and less developed regions. The transition towards a greener, more competitive, low-carbon economy will increase the value placed on the assets of such regions, and consequently their role and importance to the national economy (WDC, 2012).<sup>20</sup>

Given the stated desire for the well-being framework to become an overarching focus for policymaking, there is a risk that a lack of focus on regional issues may lead to unclear monitoring of progress and thus may distort policy choices concerning regional development. A national well-being framework should therefore attempt to seriously consider the importance of the integration of regional issues, even at the early stages of development. Considerations for regional integration are summarised below.

The initial framework and indicator set are heavily nationally focused. For example, just three of the indicators within the CSO data hub contain any regional breakdown (Table 1). Furthermore, the regional breakdown is generally confined to urban/rural. Some indicators are made available elsewhere by the CSO at a more disaggregated spatial scale but are not reported within the data hub (e.g., dwelling completions) but others cannot currently be disaggregated. A lack of focus on regional issues is also evident within the wider well-being report. The place-based nature of well-being is not discussed until page thirty-eight of the fifty-six-page report within a short paragraph. The report suggested that regional integration would be provided, at least on a limited basis, where the national data could be disaggregated “*differences will be drawn out, depending on data availability, through disaggregation by region, county or urban/rural*” (Government of Ireland, 2021) but, as noted, there are indicators within the well-being data hub reported only at the national level that could be further disaggregated.

<sup>20</sup> WDC, 2012. Submission on the Public Consultation on ‘A Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland’.

Ensuring the many facets of successful regions are present and working together in each region, and developing each place's comparative advantage, should form the basis for regional policy.

Regional integration will naturally be constrained by data availability. There will also be trade-offs between data availability and data granularity. For example, there will be greater availability of regional data, based on the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), which is a European Union geocode standard. Ireland is broken into NUTS 2 (Northern and Western; Eastern and Midland; Southern) and NUTS 3 levels (Border; West; Mid-West; South-East; South-West; Dublin; Mid-East; Midlands). However, the most comprehensive county-level data is only available in Census publications.

One option for regional integration would be to adopt the OECD regional well-being approach.<sup>21</sup> This approach involves measuring regional well-being as a complement to a national framework that uses related indicators. The OECD regional framework focuses on current regional well-being thus it is not fully integrated within its national framework. This approach offers a simple and accessible way to incorporate regional issues but with no direct focus on regional capital assets.

Regional potential arises from regional assets and advantages. Fundamentally, ensuring the many facets of successful regions are present and working together in each region, and developing each place's comparative advantage, should form the basis for regional policy (WDC, 2012). There are clear data constraints that may curtail a full integration of regional well-being and national well-being, but these potential trade-offs should be considered carefully.

Another option is to attempt to link, as much as feasible, the spatially disaggregated indicators (at the lowest feasible spatial scale) across the themes and dimensions of the national framework. This approach would appear to align more closely to the approach that underpins Project Ireland 2040, Ireland's overarching planning framework, where national objectives are linked back clearly through regional targets and regional projects designed to meet overall national goals within the National Planning Framework and the related National Development Plans.

Table 4 provides a partial and preliminary draft dashboard for consideration with some suggested indicators at the county and NUTS regional levels. For some themes and indicators, there can be a clear link established from county – region – national, this will not be feasible for others (there may be scope for town-level or Electoral District indicators). Where a clear link cannot be established, alternative indicators at each level may seek to measure a consistent theme. This approach is more consistent with the CES recommendations, and the concept of sustainable regional development and thus may permit greater alignment to link policy-relevant themes within a national framework. Potential integration with the National Planning Framework is discussed below.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.oecdregionalwellbeing.org/assets/downloads/Regional-Well-Being-User-Guide.pdf>

One option for regional integration is to measure regional well-being as a separate complement to a national framework.

Another option is to attempt to fully integrate regional issues within a national framework. This approach would appear to align more closely to the approach that underpins Project Ireland 2040.

Table 4. Potential Regional Integration within a National Framework.

Potential Dashboard for Regional Integration			
Dimension	Theme	County Level	NUTS Regional Level
Current Well-Being	Income	Household Income	Deprivation Index
	Work & Job Quality	Live Register	People living in households with very low work intensity
		Employment in Knowledge Intensive Sectors	Unemployment/Employment
		Enterprise Growth	Enterprise Growth
		Share of Micro-enterprises	Share of Micro-enterprises
	Housing & Local Area	Dwelling Completions	Dwelling Completions
		Commencement Notices	Commencement Notices
		Average Rent	Average Rent
		Average House Price	Average House Price
		Vacancy Rate	Vacancy Rate
	Mental & Physical Health	Road Traffic Deaths/injuries	Medical doctors (per 100 000 inhabitants)
		Infant Mortality rate	Hospital beds (per 100 000 inhabitants)
		Deaths due to poor mental health & self-harm	Health Care Resources
	Leisure & Recreation	Beach Flag Awards	Nights spent in tourist accommodation
		Green Coast Awards	Occupancy rate in hotels
	Knowledge, Skills & Innovation	Educational attainment	Participation Rates in Education & Training
			Regional innovation scoreboard
	Early Leavers		
	Inclusion, Safety & Community	Voter Turnout	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion
Climate, Environment & Biodiversity	Compliant water schemes	Estimated soil erosion by water	
	LA area within the 5 levels of litter pollution	% Of fossil fuels for central heating	
	% Of fossil fuels for central heating	Household Waste per capita	
	Air & Water Quality	Air & Water Quality	
	Household Waste	Household Waste per capita	
Subjective Well-being	Survey Data	Survey Data	
Future Well-Being	Natural Capital	Beach Flag & Coast Awards	Beach Flag & Coast Awards
		Bioeconomy Employment	Bioeconomy Employment
		Mineral & Energy Resources	Mineral & Energy Resources
		Timber Resources	Timber Resources
	Economic Capital	Social Housing Stock	Gross Fixed Capital Formation
		Pavement Surface Condition Index (PSCI) Ratings	Pavement Surface Condition Index (PSCI) Ratings
		Physical Infrastructure	Road, rail, & navigable inl& waterways networks
	Human Capital	Local Sustainability (fertility etc.)	Local Sustainability (fertility etc.)
			R&D expenditures
		Third Level Grants awarded	Third Level Grants awarded
Social Capital	Population – Population Changes	Population	
	Voter Turnout	Voter Turnout	
	Deaths due to mental health	Deaths due to mental health	

The National Planning Framework (NPF) sets out the vision for the development of Irish society over the coming decades. This vision is encapsulated by ten National Strategic Objectives (NSOs)

There is a considerable gap between the NSOs and the well-being framework in relation to the focus placed on public service provision and regional connectivity and accessibility contained within the NSOs.

## Integration with the National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) sets out the vision for the development of Irish society over the coming decades. This vision is encapsulated by ten National Strategic Objectives (NSOs) and surrounds more balanced regional development. There will be natural overlaps with well-being indicators and potential metrics to monitor the NSOs. One approach would be to include the NSOs directly as specific themes within the well-being framework. Alternatively, the indicators within the framework could be tagged as relating to the NSOs.

Table 5 provides some suggested indicators at the county level that cut across the NSOs and presents related well-being themes for several of the NSOs. For example, the NSO of “a strong economy supported by enterprise, innovation and skills” is clearly related to the well-being theme of “knowledge, skills and innovation”. However, there appears to be a gap between the NSOs and the well-being framework concerning the NSO’s focus on public service provision (“access to quality childcare, education, and health services” and “sustainable mobility”) and regional connectivity and accessibility (“enhanced regional accessibility”; “strengthened rural economies & communities”; “high-quality international connectivity”). This might be resolved through additional well-being themes such as “public service provision”, “access to services” and “regional connectivity & accessibility”.

*Table 5. Draft Integration of NPF and Well-being/Sustainable Development Framework*

National Planning Framework Integration		
NSO Theme	County Level	Related Well-Being Theme
Compact Growth	Population Growth Targets within NPF	Human Capital
Enhanced Regional Accessibility	Rural mobility indicators: Journey times to urban centres etc., Regional NDP Projects & Expenditure Remote Working Hub Usage	N/A
Strengthened Rural Economies & Communities	Access to high-quality broadband Employment & Enterprise Incomes	N/A
Sustainable Mobility	Active travel indicators: Mode of transportation	N/A
A strong Economy Supported by Enterprise Innovation & Skills	Enterprise & employment growth Employment in Knowledge Intensive Services Education, skills, & training	Knowledge, Skills & Innovation
High-quality International Connectivity	Connectivity to & passenger/freight statistics at, airports & ports Tourism indicators	N/A
Enhanced amenity & heritage	Access to cultural & recreational services (e.g., walking routes, cycleways OPW sites heritage sites)	Leisure & Recreation Climate, Environment & Biodiversity Natural Capital
Transition to a low carbon & Climate-resilient society	LEVs licensed. Household heating fuel type; BER ratings Sustainable Energy Communities	Climate, Environment & Biodiversity Natural Capital
Sustainable management of Water, Waste, & oth. Environmental Resources	Waste & Environment indicators from Local Authority Performance Indicators EPA water quality & service statistics	Climate, Environment & Biodiversity Natural Capital
Access to quality Childcare, education, & health services	Access to services, Childcare & health statistics	N/A



Sustainable regional development policy involves a focus on harnessing regional capital assets and underlines the role of public policy to enable regions to harness those assets.

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## Policy Insights

The stated desire for the national well-being framework is to become an overarching focus for policymaking. To maximise national development regions must be enabled to harness the assets at their disposal to reach their potential. The national well-being framework risks a lack of focus on sustainable development and lacks regional integration. These issues risk distorting policy choices, implementation, and evaluation concerning sustainable national and regional development.

This Policy Briefing makes two key recommendations relevant to the future development of the national well-being framework:

1) **A further strengthening of the concept of sustainable development in addition to the recent improvements to the framework:**

This Policy Briefing provided considerations for changes to the current framework and offered an amended framework to further the conceptual and analytical emphasis on the concept of sustainable development.

2) **Enhanced Regional integration:**

Any overarching policy framework must include regional integration to ensure clear monitoring of progress, policy choices and evaluation concerning regional development. This Policy Briefing outlined the weaknesses of the national well-being framework in relation to regional disaggregation. Several considerations for the integration of regional issues within a coherent national framework were provided.

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