Inclusive Participation in Rural Scotland: A Preliminary Exploration

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Acknowledgments

Contents

1 Executive Summary

This report details the findings of research into barriers to participation facing lesser heard voices in the context of rural Scotland. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting a Rural Movement, which can be described as a grass-roots process that seeks to connect rural communities with decision makers. The purpose of a Rural Movement, as outlined by Scottish Rural Action (SRA), is two-fold:

1. "To connect rural communities of place and of interest, enabling them to share their expertise and best practice on matters relating to rural resilience, redesign and renewal."

2. "To advance two-way dialogue between rural communities and decision-makers, ensuring that policy and legislation at all levels of government is enacted in response to expert input from those living and working in rural Scotland."

The Scottish Government recognises the need to ensure this Rural Movement, and the associated biennial meeting of the Rural Parliament, should be inclusive of all rural voices and experiences.

The following report intends to assist in this regard, presenting findings from qualitative research that aimed to:

a) Understand the rural experiences of four communities of interest (LGBTI people, disabled people, ethnic minorities, and carers) in Scotland;

b) Understand the barriers to participation these communities face in relation to rural policy and decision-making in Scotland; and

c) Understand how these barriers to participation may be addressed.

The term 'communities of interest' will hence forth refer to the four groups collectively.

Literature review findings

Previous research regarding the rural experiences of the communities of interest, and the barriers to participation these communities face in relation to rural policy and decision-making, is relatively limited in both the Scottish context and that of the wider United Kingdom. However, available evidence did highlight rural experiences such as prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion more broadly. Possible barriers to rural participation that were highlighted included those extending from social exclusion, poor transport, employment patterns, and policy invisibility.

Demographics

A higher proportion of the population identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other in urban Scotland than in rural Scotland. Ethnic minorities make up a higher proportion of the population in urban settings than rural settings. However, there is no clear relationship between rurality and care provision nor the proportion of disabled people.

The Social Survey Core Questions (SSCQ) indicate that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other (LGBO) population of Scotland is estimated at 2.9%. There is no reliable data on Scotland's trans population. A higher proportion of the population identify as LGBO in urban areas than in rural.

Ethnic minorities are estimated to make up around 11% of Scotland's population. with the exception of the white polish population. However, this population is unevenly geographically distributed. For example, while 6.7% of Scotland's large urban areas population identified as either Asian, Asian Scottish, or Asian British ethnicities, this was the case for only 0.4% of the population in remote rural areas.

The Scottish Health Survey (SHeS) estimated that, in 2020, disabled people made up 31% of Scotland's population. According to the SSCQ, the proportion of disabled people in urban and rural areas varies, but does not appear to vary consistently with the level of rurality in which individual lives.

According to the SHeS, an estimated 19% of Scotland's population undertake unpaid care work. The SSCQ, which provides a slightly higher estimate, provides a breakdown of these results relative to the Scottish Government six-fold Urban Rural Classification. Based on this data, there is no clear relationship between rurality and levels of care provision.

Methods

Six stakeholder interviews were conducted with individuals who, in a professional capacity, had engaged with these disadvantaged groups in rural Scotland.

Findings

The main findings are as follows:

- The experiences of the communities of interest in rural Scotland often constitute, or are co-factors in the formation of, barriers to participation in both society more broadly, and rural policy and decision-making more specifically. To put this another way, the participants in the research noted several challenges facing the communities of interest in rural Scotland: geographic isolation, social isolation, and social exclusion; a lack of infrastructure and services that meet groups' needs; a lack of representation within decision-making bodies; minority stress and challenging economic conditions and circumstances in rural Scotland. These experiences, in turn, make participation in rural Scotland more challenging.

- With this in mind, specific barriers to participation in decision making could be addressed through the active inclusion of the communities of interest, with attention to their lived experience, in the decision-making process. Stakeholders stressed that the onus to pursue this inclusion was on the decision-making bodies and organisations, and not the communities of interest themselves. One example of this are the Disability Access Panels that exist in most council areas of Scotland. Another approach could be to include organisations that have an already established relationship with the communities of interest.

- However, addressing the wider social and economic barriers to participation present in rural Scotland may also require policy interventions beyond the scope of what is discussed here. For example, one participant suggested the adoption of a universal basic income as a mechanism to address economic barriers to participation. While this conclusion is out of the scope of this report, the broader economic context of participation should be noted.

2 Highlights

What is this report?

The Scottish Government wanted evidence to inform policy making about barriers to participation in decision making in rural Scotland, with an emphasis on lesser heard from voices in these contexts. Decision making in this context is defined relatively loosely, including both participation in the rural parliament and participation in civic society in rural areas more generally. This work intends to support the Scottish 'rural movement'.

What evidence was collected?

To write this report, we reviewed available demographic data, undertook a literature review of relevant research on rurality and barriers to participation for minority groups and conducted six stakeholder interviews with organisations who engage with this area in a professional capacity. Specifically, we focused on the experiences of the LGBTI community, ethnic and racial minorities, carers and disabled people.

Key Findings

There is a higher proportion of ethnic minorities and of the population who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other in urban Scotland than in rural Scotland. However, there is no clear relationship between rurality and care provision nor the proportion of disabled people.

The review of evidence found that the available research on the experiences of rurality among the above communities of interest is relatively sparse. Available evidence indicates that these groups face considerable challenges in rural Scotland, including a lack of appropriate services, hostility, and a lack of social opportunities.

The qualitative research identified a range of barriers facing these groups. It was emphasised that, in rural contexts, barriers facing these groups tend to result from the coexistence of more general rural barriers – for example, sparsely populated communities and expensive travel options – with existing barriers facing the communities of interest. Thus, as one participant observed, the social stigma of being LGBTI may be enhanced by being in a location with very limited access to a supportive community, owing to the sparse populations of many rural areas. Minority stress, the high rural costs of living and decision making processes that didn't take all needs into account were also noted as barriers. In terms of addressing these challenges, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that the lived experiences of the communities of interest were incorporated into decision making, and emphasised that the onus should be on organisations with decision making power to ensure that these groups were represented.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Scottish Government and other relevant organisations explore options for supporting these communities of interest in a rural context. While there are many options to provide support, one approach may be to build on the existing work of the Scottish Rural Network and Equality Network, or alternatively to develop a specific rural equalities network.

3 Introduction

This report seeks to assist efforts to address barriers to participation in Scottish rural policy and decision-making. It presents findings from qualitative research which consisted of six stakeholder interviews. This research aimed to:

a) Understand the rural experiences of four communities of interest in Scotland;

b) Understand the barriers to participation these communities face in relation to rural policy and decision-making; and

c) Understand how these barriers to participation may be addressed.

The four communities of interest this research focussed on were: LGBTI people, disabled people, ethnic minorities, and carers. While the latter are not a protected community under the Equality Act 2010, they are nonetheless protected by the Act from discrimination by association (see Section 2.4 for definition) (Government of the United Kingdom, 2010). It should be noted from the outset that each of these communities are heterogeneous in composition. Further, communities of interest can intersect, and an individual may hypothetically belong to all four. While the research presented here sought to highlight common themes, this heterogeneity and intersectionality should be kept in mind.

The basis for this research extends from the 2019-20 Programme for Government (Scottish Government, 2019c). Here the Scottish Government outlines their commitment to support a Rural Movement. This will be achieved through working with, amongst other organisations, Scottish Rural Action. This report intends to support a Rural Movement to 'include a more diverse range of voices, including those in disadvantaged groups' (Scottish Rural Action, 2020a).

Scottish Rural Action outline the objectives of the Rural Movement as being:

1. "To connect rural communities of place and of interest, enabling them to share their expertise and best practice on matters relating to rural resilience, redesign and renewal."

2. "To advance two-way dialogue between rural communities and decision-makers, ensuring that policy and legislation at all levels of government is enacted in response to expert input from those living and working in rural Scotland."

A key forum for the Rural Movement's engagement is the Scottish Rural Parliament. The Scottish Rural Parliament is a biennial event organised by Scottish Rural Action. It represents a large gathering of Scottish rural representatives, individuals, and organisations, and brings together rural communities and decision makers (Scottish Rural Action, 2020b). The inspiration for such a rural parliament originates from established rural parliaments in other European countries and was initially proposed for Scotland in the 2011 manifesto of the Scottish National Party (Scottish National Party, 2011).

The Rural Movement can be understood as part of broader efforts to enhance local decision-making in Scotland, which also includes the development of participatory budgeting since 2014[1]. In an evaluation of participatory budgeting, published in 2019, it was noted that overcoming barriers to participation in this process remained an important objective for the participatory budget process (O'Hagan et al., 2019). This indicates the cross-cutting relevance of the work presented here.

Three sections follow in this report. The next section provides a background on each of the four communities of interest in relation to the aims of the report. The following section presents findings from the qualitative research undertaken. The final section of the report provides the conclusion to the research.

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[1] A process whereby communities participate directly in the allocation of a proportion of the local budget.

4 Background

4.1 LGBTI in rural Scotland

Section Summary

- The Social Survey Core Questions (SSCQ) indicate that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other (LGBO) population of Scotland is estimated at 2.6%. There is no reliable data on Scotland's trans population. A higher proportion of the population identify as LGBO in urban areas than in rural.
- The Scottish Government has a history of policy developments promoting equality for Scotland's LGBTI population. This includes the **Marriage and Civil Partnerships (Scotland) Act 2014** and, currently, the reformation of the Gender Recognition Act 2004.
- Previous research highlights the disadvantage experienced by LGBTI people in rural Scotland. This includes social isolation, discrimination, prejudice, and a lack of services. Barriers to participation in rural policy and decision-making may extend from broader social exclusion.

4.1.1 Demographics

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimated that, in 2018, the proportion of the Scottish population identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) was 2% (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Data from the 2019 Scottish Surveys Core Questions....higher estimate of 2.9%. However, includes non-heterosexual orientations other than LGB (designated as 'other', and collectively as LGBO) (Scottish Government, 2020c).

We currently do not have reliable data on the size of Scotland's trans population. The Government Equalities Office, in 2018, observed that there was no robust data on the UK trans population, and provided a tentative estimate of 200,000-500,000 trans people in the UK.[2]

Further, we do not currently have robust data on the number of non-binary people in Scotland. Since 2018, the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) has provided the option for people to describe their gender identity as 'man/boy,' 'woman/girl,' or 'in another way' (Scottish Government, 2020b), resulting in 0.1% defining their gender 'in another way' and 0.2% refusing to answer. In 2019, 0.0% of respondents identified 'in another way'. It should be noted that the SHS does not ask people whether they identify as trans, or have a trans history.

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[2] Government Equalities Office (2018) Trans People in the UK. UK Government. Available here: Trans people in the UK (publishing.service.gov.uk)

As the Scottish Household Survey notes, however, these figures are likely to under-report the number of people not identifying as a man or woman, or as LGB, owing to a range of factors including but not limited to prejudice/stigma and the possibility that such questions may be considered intrusive.

The 2019 SSCQ[3] provides estimates of Scotland's LGBO population stratified along the Scottish Government 6 fold Urban Rural Classification and can be seen in Figure 1. As this shows, there is a higher prevalence of people identifying as LGBO in large urban and other areas, including those which are rural. This may partially reflect the fact that, as reported by the Equality Network in 2015 that, concerning those living in rural areas: "Four out of ten LGBT respondents (43%) have either moved, or considered moving, to live in a different area because of being LGBT" (Equality Network 2015: 8).

Figure 1: Percentage of population identifying as LGBO by the Scottish Government six-fold Urban Rural Classification in 2019
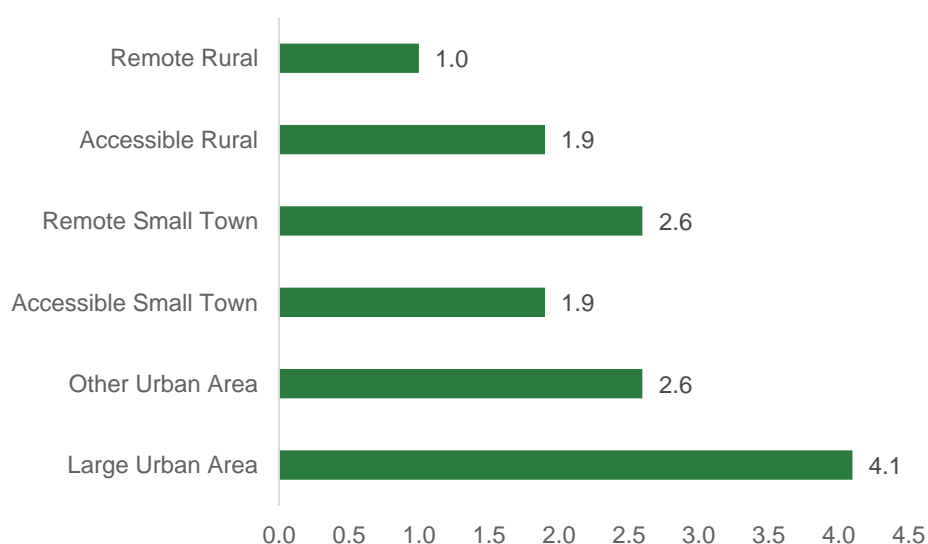
4.1.2 Policy developments

In 2014, the Scottish Government introduced the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act. This extended marriage to same-sex couples. Other policy developments introduced include the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, allowing same-sex couples to adopt jointly, and the Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) Act 2009 to address hate crime. More recently the Scottish Government held a public consultation on a draft Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill. This Bill intends to amend the process by which people can legally obtain gender recognition – originally set out in the Gender Recognition Act 2004 – to make it less intrusive (Scottish Government, 2019b). Consultation on the draft Bill ended in March 2020, however the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a current suspension of work on the Bill by the Scottish Government.

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[3] Scottish Surveys Core Questions 2019 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot). The social survey core questions are questions asked in all large-scale surveys undertaken by the Scottish Government and facilitate regular updates on core demographic questions.

4.1.3 Previous research

The recent Scottish LGBT Rural Equalities report, published by the Equalities Network, focuses on the experiences of the LGBT community in rural Scotland (Crowther et al., 2020). Presenting findings from both survey and qualitative research, it notably highlights that LGBT people in rural Scotland experience inequality, prejudice, and discrimination, and a lack of both services and social opportunities.

This research was preceded by a 2015 report which provided comparative survey findings between rural and urban settings in Scotland (Equality Network, 2015). This report highlighted that rural LGBT people faced greater social isolation, were more dissatisfied with services, and were more likely to travel outwith their local area to access services than their urban counterparts.

The above research does not explicitly discuss barriers to participation in rural policy or decision-making. However, it is conceivable that the experiences of LGBTI people in rural Scotland could function as barriers, a possibility that finds support within the research presented here. This also finds some support from UK wide research that links barriers to political participation amongst LGBT people to broader social exclusion (e.g. as a result of discrimination or prejudice) (Ryrie et al., 2010).

4.2 Disabled people in rural Scotland

Section Summary

- Disability is defined as a long-term limiting ('substantial') condition or illness lasting, or expected to last, at least 12 months.
- The Scottish Health Survey (SHeS) estimated that, in 2019, 35% of Scotland's population fall under this definition of being a disabled person. According to the SSCQ, the proportion of disabled people in urban and rural areas varies, but does not appear to vary consistently with the level of rurality in which individual lives.
- A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People Action Plan established the policy direction of the Scottish Government
- This report is not aware of any primary research relating to the experiences of disabled people in rural Scotland or indeed barriers to their participation in rural policy and decision making.

4.2.1 Demographics

The SHeS estimates that, in 2020, 31% of adults in Scotland population were disabled (defined as a long-term limiting condition or illness lasting, or expected to last, at least 12 months) (Scottish Government, 2021)[4].

The SHeS is the preferred source for these figures, but does not provide breakdowns related to sexuality and rurality, which can be found in the 2019 SSCQ (Scottish Government, 2020c). These note that the prevalence of disabled people was higher amongst those identifying as LGBO (35%) compared to those identifying as heterosexual (25%). They also indicate that there is variation in the proportion of disabled people across the different categories of the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification, but these do not appear to consistently vary with level of rurality. For instance, 23% of the people in Large Urban Areas are disabled people, compared to 30% in Other Urban Areas, 25% in Accessible Rural Areas, and 23% in Remote Rural Areas. Similarly, the 2018 Scottish Household Survey found roughly equal proportions of disabled people (30%) in urban and rural areas, despite the increasing prevalence of disability with age and the higher proportions of older people living in rural areas (Scottish Government 2019d).

4.2.2 Policy developments

Current Scottish Government policy related to disabled people extends from the Fairer Scotland for Disabled People action plan, which establishes the 'overall direction of travel' for the Scottish Government until 2021 (Scottish Government, 2016). The Scottish Government adopts the 'social model of disability' which, unlike the medical model, understands disability as being constituted by the relationship between the individual and society. That is, societal barriers are the cause of disadvantage and exclusion, not an individual's impairment. The report details actions to be taken concerning service provision, employment and social security, accessibility, and societal participation. Relevant to the research presented here, the report highlights that many of the challenges faced by disabled people may be exacerbated amongst those living in rural settings. The plan states that the Scottish Government are working with Local Action Groups[5] through the Scottish Rural Network to 'develop and stimulate new ideas for improving the life chances of disabled people in rural areas'.

4.2.3 Previous research

Both in relation to the rural experiences of disabled people in Scotland, and in relation to their participation in policy and decision-making, this report did not identify any primary research. A 2017 report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission does highlight that limited public transport in rural areas may exacerbate isolation from supportive social networks (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017).

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[4] The SIMD is an area-based measure of deprivation in Scotland. There are 6,976 areas (data zones) each containing approximately 700-800 people. These areas are ranked from the least deprived to the most. This data may be stratified by quintile (i.e. into 5 groups), with each quintile corresponding to 20% of the data.

[5] These are groups of community members that implement the LEADER rural development scheme, i.e. applying for funding to support local economic development projects.

## 4.3 Ethnic minorities in rural Scotland

Section summary

- Ethnic minorities are estimated to make up around 11% of Scotland's population. With the exception of the white Polish population, ethnic minorities make up a higher proportion of the population in urban settings than rural settings.
- Scottish Government policy related to ethnic minorities extends from the Fairer Scotland for All: Race Equality Action Plan (2017-21).
- Ethnic minorities in rural Scotland are concerned with policy invisibility, higher chances of racist assault, and social exclusion. Barriers to participation in rural policy and decision-making may be linked to factors such as social exclusion, poor public transport, and employment patterns.

4.3.1 Demographics

Data from the 2019 SSCQ estimates that 2.9% of Scotland's population are Asian, Asian Scottish, or Asian British, 1.9% are white Polish, 4.9% are white other (includes 'Gypsy/Traveller', 'white: Irish', and other white ethnic groups), and 1.8% as 'all other ethnic groups' (includes categories within 'Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Group', 'African', 'Caribbean or Black', and 'Other Ethnic Group') (Scottish Government, 2020c).

With the exception of white Polish, all other minority ethnic groups make up a higher proportion of the population in Large Urban Areas than any other category of the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification. For example, while 6.7% of Scotland's large urban areas population identified as either Asian, Asian Scottish, or Asian British ethnicities, this was the case for only 0.4% of the population in remote rural areas. A further breakdown of the figures from the 2019 survey is displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Percentage of ethnic minorities by the Scottish Government six-fold Urban Rural Classification.
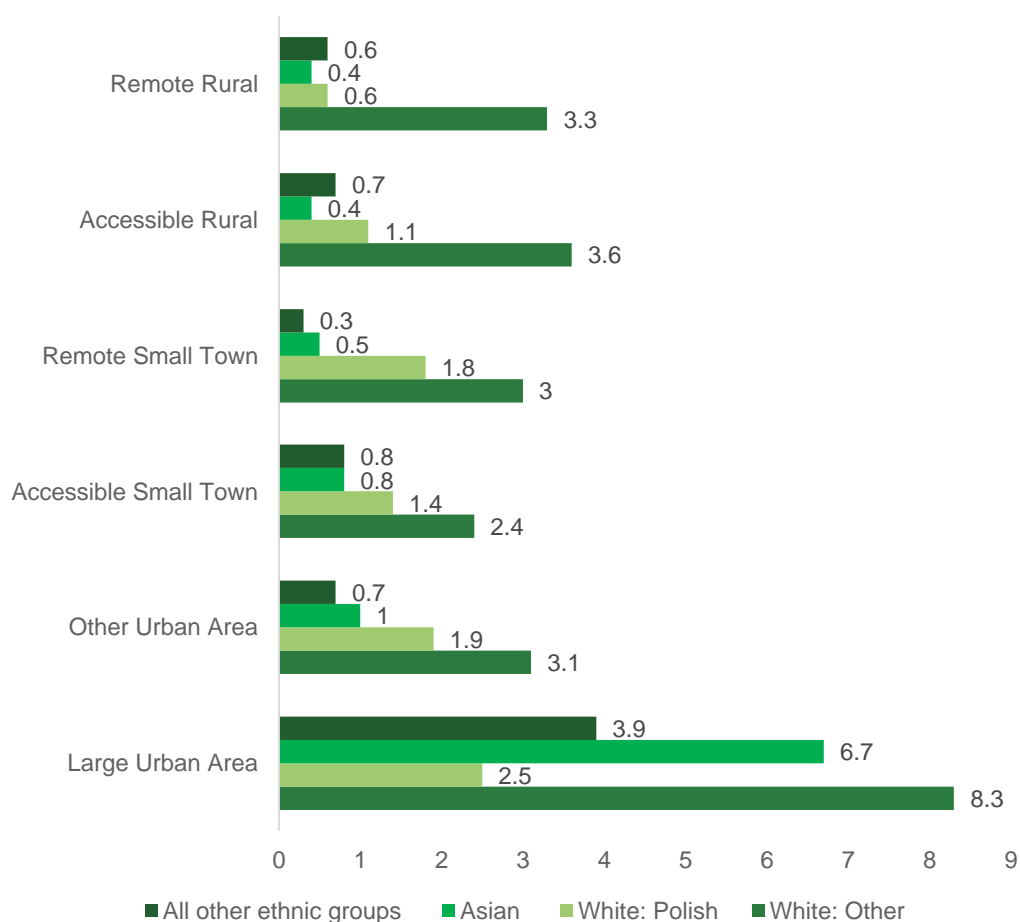
4.3.2 Policy developments

Fairer Scotland for All: Race Equality Action Plan (2017-21) sets out Scottish Government actions taking forward the Race Equality Framework for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2017a). This report outlines various policy areas – employment, health, education, housing, and poverty – and provides a range of actions being undertaken by the Scottish Government for each.

4.3.3 Previous research

A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report from 2011 highlights that ethnic minority groups living in rural Scotland are concerned with invisibility in the policy context, the higher chances of racist assault, and social exclusion (poor access to services, lack of information & advice, and lack of involvement/consideration in local governance) (de Lima et al., 2011). A more recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report notes that the situation of ethnic minorities may be worsened by higher costs of living in rural areas, with smaller ethnic minority groups at risk of being 'doubly-disadvantaged' (Kelly, 2016). There is some qualitative evidence from the wider UK suggesting that ethnic minority communities may experience 'covert and overt' racism to a greater

extent in rural settings than in urban settings where such communities are larger (Ware, 2015).

Ethnic minorities in rural Scotland face barriers to service access such as poor information & advice, language barriers, lack of monitoring and evaluation of minority ethnic experiences, and lack of knowledge and skills amongst service providers (Kelly, 2016). In England, research indicates that engagement in rural ethnic minority community groups is frustrated by social isolation, poor public transport, and diverse employment patterns (Ware, 2015). It is conceivable that these barriers may, in turn, contribute to barriers experienced in relation to rural and policy decision-making.

4.4 Carers in rural Scotland

Section Summary

- According to the SHeS, an estimated 14% of Scotland's population undertake unpaid care work. The SSCQ, which provides a slightly higher estimate, provides a breakdown of these results relative to the Scottish Government six-fold Urban Rural Classification. There is no clear relationship between rurality and care provision.

- Recent Scottish Government policy consists in the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, with rights of carers extending from this Act specified in the Carers' charter.

- Research on the experience of carers in rural Scotland is sparse. There are some indications that young carers in rural settings may experience disadvantage in relation to higher education and that older carers in rural settings may face social exclusion.

Carers – those who undertake unpaid (or non-waged) care work – are not considered a protected group under the Equality Act 2010. However, they are protected under the Act from "discrimination by association", which pertains to any discrimination faced as a result of being associated with someone belonging to a protected group (e.g. a disabled person). Carers are of interest to this research owing to the implications unpaid care work has for participation in social and political life. For example, having caring responsibilities has an impact on employment, finances, and social relationships (Scottish Government, 2020a).

4.4.1 Demographics

The 2021 SHeS estimates that 19% of Scotland's population provide care (Scottish Government, 2020). While data from the 2019 SHeS gives an overall picture of caring in Scotland, they are not stratified by rural-urban settings. However, the 2019 SSCQ estimates do provide a breakdown of care by the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification (see Figure 3); although it should be noted that the 2019 SSCQ

estimate for the proportion of Scotland's population providing care is lower, at 16%. Figure 3 – which uses data from this source - shows that, while remote small towns have the highest number of residents providing care, there is no clear relationship between rurality and levels of care provision.

Figure 4: Percentage of people provided care by the Scottish Government 6 fold Urban Rural Classification. Source: Scottish Surveys Core Questions 2019
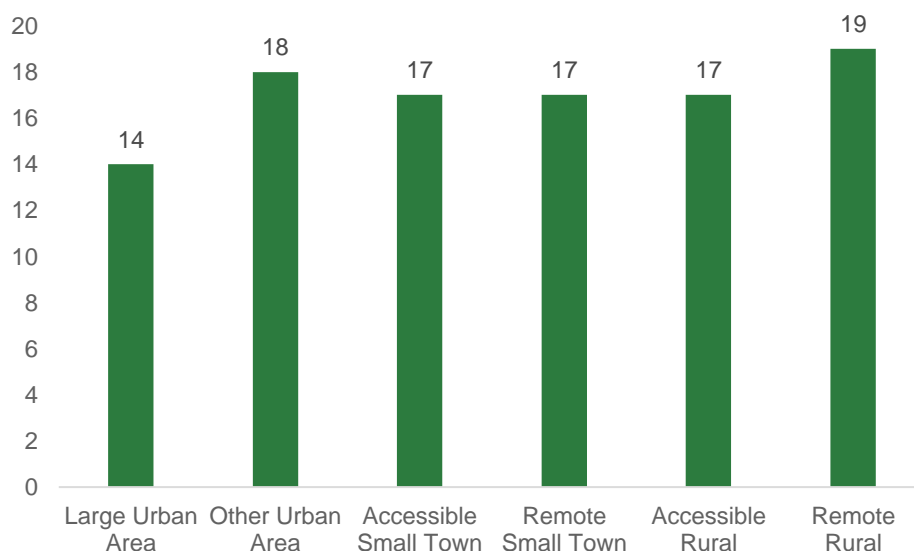
4.4.2 Policy developments

The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 took effect in April 2018. The Act required the development of a Carers' Charter which specifies the rights of carers following from the Act (Scottish Government, 2018a). This charter states that a) local authorities must offer a carer support plan to anyone they identify as an adult carer, or a young carer statement to anyone they identify as a young carer, b) local authorities must meet 'eligible needs' of carers, c) carers have the right to involvement in service provision, and d) carers have the right to be involved in the hospital discharge of those they care for. In addition to this, a draft of a Carers Strategic Policy Statement was consulted on in 2019 (Scottish Government, 2019a). This statement aims to support local and national planning and policy development. However, neither the Carers' Charter nor the Carers Strategic Policy Statement give specific attention to carers living in rural Scotland.

4.4.3 Previous research

There is some previous government research on young carers, though it simply compares the level of care and tasks involved between rural and urban settings, finding that there is little difference (Scottish Government, 2017b). However, this does not give much indication of young carers' rural experiences, although the report does note that being a young carer in a rural setting may have a disproportionate impact on decisions related to higher education e.g. the choice to attend university, location of university, and mode of study. This could further exacerbate the disadvantage experienced by young carers.

Other research on carers in rural Scotland focuses on those caring for people with dementia. Blackstock et al. (2006) found that some carers view rurality in a positive light, where the 'close-knit' community had positive implications for formal service provision (e.g. more person-centred care than in urban settings). However, they also found that problems with family and neighbours could worsen the situations of some and that perceived stigma could lead to exclusion and isolation. More recent research on the same population highlighted a number of concerns regarding fears over driving and the lack of other transport options (i.e. poor public transport), that attending support groups for carers was made difficult by costs and logistics, and that relevant information was not presented in appropriate formats (Innes et al., 2014).

There is no relevant research explicitly discussing barriers to participation faced by carers in rural policy and decision-making. It is conceivable, again, that the experiences of carers in rural Scotland feed into the barriers to participation they may face, but more research would be required in order to demonstrate this.

5 Research methods and findings

Section summary

•   The experiences of barriers to participation in rural Scotland, include, for example: dispersed populations and social isolation, inadequate service provision and access, inadequate infrastructure, employment patterns, the nature of the rural economy, a lack of representation on decision-making bodies, and minority stress.

•   Overall, it appears that there are both barriers that result from rurality, and barriers that result from communities of interest facing discrimination. In the rural context, it is possible for these to overlap and reinforce each other, creating a double disadvantage.

•   Overcoming barriers may entail the inclusion of lived experience on decision-making bodies and addressing rural economic challenges (e.g. through a universal basic income).

5.1 Methodology

We conducted interviews with six stakeholders who, in a professional capacity, had engaged with the communities of interest in rural Scotland. Stakeholders were approached based on their organisation's role in relation to these communities. While some stakeholders spoke about the communities of interest more generally, others focussed on a specific community. Interviews were approximately 45 minutes long and followed a semi-structured format. Interview questions focussed on the experiences of the communities of interest in rural Scotland, barriers to their participation in rural policy and decision-making, and possible means of overcoming such barriers.

5.2 Experiences and barriers

5.2.1 Rural geography

The geography of rural settings was seen as important in shaping the experiences of certain groups, with one stakeholder stating that:

> "The biggest problem for LGBTI people who live rurally is they don't live in one part of rural Scotland […] It's a community without a specific geographical location"

This highlights that members of a community of interest in rural Scotland are often dispersed over a large geographic area. One problem that extends from this is that the provision of – and access to – services and support tailored to the needs of this community of interest is made more difficult than it would otherwise be with a centralised population. As highlighted by another stakeholder, a dispersed population can also lead to feelings of isolation amongst members of a community who may not live in close proximity to others who share their experiences. Another stakeholder highlighted that isolation can further frustrate service access with isolated individuals turning a "blind eye" to services and not accessing them. Low numbers in a given geographical area was also cited as a barrier to communities of interest establishing meetings and groups, irrespective of the desire to do so.

One stakeholder, speaking more generally, highlighted that in rural areas identity is tied to geography (i.e. those that live in close proximity to you). Identity in urban areas, by comparison, may more likely be linked to shared interest. For the communities of interest in rural settings, this can stand as a barrier to participation if you are perceived as being on the social periphery of this geographic community. In this context, being perceived as an "incomer", a concept this stakeholder noted may be applied quite broadly, and the internalisation of this perception, can limit people's voice in shaping their community. However, it should be noted that this particular stakeholder was wary of making "blanket statements" about rural Scotland citing it as both geographically and culturally diverse.

5.2.2 Rural economy and employment

Stakeholders highlighted how the structures of local economy and employment could act as barriers to participation in the community more generally. One stakeholder spoke about how someone's voice in the community may be linked to their economic standing or ability to generate monetary wealth, stating that:

> "It seems that your right to have a say is dependent on your ability to be economically independent"

This is especially problematic for those who may face barriers to employment as a result of, for example, being a disabled person or having caring responsibilities. This stakeholder stated that if people do not feel their contribution to the community is valued – because it is not recognised as generating monetary wealth – they may not feel that they have anything to contribute in terms of decision-making in the community.

The importance of supporting wider economic activities (e.g. unpaid care work, childcare, and informal voluntary work), which sustain rural communities and generate "community wealth", was emphasised. These activities are often undertaken in conjunction with waged work in rural settings, where such work is often precarious and poorly paid. This stakeholder explained that participation in community groups would require that the costs of childcare, care, and transport were covered, as these costs are typically beyond many people's means. There is a perception that funding is prioritised for initiatives that stand to generate monetary value over other initiatives that support rural communities.

Speaking generally about rural communities, one stakeholder discussed the potential of a universal basic income to alleviate a number of the challenges these communities face thereby permitting greater participation in processes of decision-making:

> "The one thing that would really help, and would help also with participation and democratic decision-making, is really a universal basic income. In an [rural] area like us where everybody, despite the fact that they work maybe two or three jobs, will still volunteer and do so informally. The whole of the society is predicated on volunteering. If you alleviated some of the financial stress on people it would create a lot more of an equal footing for people to actually participate"

This participant also talked about potential benefits of localism and local decision-making, but qualified this with the need to maintain a conversation in rural communities about equality issues and the experience of disadvantaged groups.

Another stakeholder highlighted that while equality and diversity is on the agenda of organisations and companies more generally, this is less likely to be the case for those that are smaller and operating in rural areas. As has been established elsewhere, rural economies, and particularly remote rural economies, are characterised by high levels of micro-enterprises, with fewer large employers than in urban areas (Scottish Government, 2018). This was reiterated by another stakeholder who discussed divergent 'attitudes' between rural and urban areas in relation to disabled people, and argued that rural organisations have less awareness of reasonable adjustment and the Equality Act 2010.

One stakeholder described how, in parts of rural Scotland, ethnic minorities employed in low-skilled work – namely the agricultural and service industries – face barriers to participation in society that extend from employment. Research estimates that there were approximately 9, 225 migrant workers employed in Scottish agriculture in 2017, who were employed for an average of four months a year (SRUC 2018). This stakeholder felt that the barrier is a lack of English language skills which is often favoured by employers:

> "Our experience is that it works in the employer's favour to have separate teams working different shifts who are all of one language group and there is no collective action they need to worry about, they can sort of divide and rule"

In this stakeholders view, this is compounded by other barriers such as long shifts, living on site with a lack of amenities (e.g. an internet connection), and a lack of public transport, thus creating a "bubble" around work. They argued that this may result in employers effectively functioning as gatekeepers to the participation in society of their employees, giving them the power to undermine such participation to meet their own ends:

> "They [the employers] don't want people to know what their rights are, and it's quite clear from the way they interact with us"

Not only does this exclude ethnic minorities in such employment from support services, but they may also face employment practices that limit their opportunities to engage with the rural communities they live in.

5.2.3 Rural services and infrastructure

Another challenge is related to service design and local amenities. One stakeholder stated that, for LGBTI people living in rural Scotland, services are felt to be unable to meet their needs:

> "a lot of [LGBTI] people that live rurally say to us basically there is nothing for them in rural areas. So, whether it is socialising or whether they are looking for equalities competent healthcare or whether they want to speak about their mental health [...] they don't feel like there are services in rural areas for them, so many people come into the urban areas for that"

As the quote highlights,, LGBTI people in rural areas travel or move to urban areas to access services.. The cost and poor availability of transport, as noted by a number of stakeholders, may pose another barrier. It is worth noting that, in 2018, Scottish Rural Action undertook a survey about the costs of transport in rural areas for young people (Scottish Rural Action, 2018). Among other findings, the survey of 308 young people aged 16-26 from rural areas noted that 48% of young people have been prevented from going to work because travel is too expensive and almost 30% of young people have been stopped from accessing education or training because travel is too costly.

A lack of service provision meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups ties into the previous point regarding dispersed populations and the difficulties this poses – the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in this context, and the emergence of online service provision, will be discussed shortly. This stakeholder also noted that funded LGBTI organisations based in the central belt are expected to reach people living rurally, but that this expectation is not matched by the additional funding that would be necessary.

In relation to disabled people living in rural Scotland, one stakeholder discussed the lack of investment in services and infrastructure:

> "There is a real, from what we're seeing, lack of investment in terms of providing disabled people who live in rural and remote areas with decent public transport, with decent services, access to healthcare. The investment in buildings is often lacking as well."

These factors all stand to limit the participation of disabled people in society, and lead to a differential experience between disabled people living rurally and those living in urban areas.

5.2.4 Representation in rural decision-making

There was also a sense in which stakeholders felt there was a lack of representation of certain communities of interest within the decision-making structure. One stakeholder identified that a lack of representation on decision-making bodies can result in "indirect discrimination", as these bodies may be blind to the lived experience of disadvantaged groups:

> "[D]iscrimination may not be active but there's potential there for decision-making bodies to be blind to your particular experiences and issues"

It is conceivable that this could function to further reinforce the problem at hand.

A prominent theme that emerged was that the responsibility for addressing barriers does not lie with the communities of interest. Without addressing barriers, it is unlikely groups will become involve in decision-making:

> "But without addressing some of those [barriers] it's quite difficult to convince that it's worthwhile for people to put themselves on the line and get involved in decision-making because it kind of feels like a lost battle."

In relation to this, this particular stakeholder emphasised the importance of what they described as "messaging":

> "Minority communities and marginalised communities, no matter what they are, if they don't see efforts being made to reach out, to find out more, to learn, then they're not going to trust and involve themselves"

Another stakeholder spoke of 'real' participation, which was contrasted to an example of already established decision-making bodies reaching out for a 'representative' voice while not actually fostering participation in the community. They also cautioned against a "quick fix", stating that addressing these barriers is not simply a task of setting up and funding an action group on short-term basis.

One suggested approach to overcoming barriers to participation was to actively invite communities to the decision-making table and provide the space for lived experience to inform decisions. This could be through organisations that have an already established relationship with disadvantaged groups. In the case of disabled people, Disability Access Panels[6] (DAP) have existed in both rural and urban Scotland since the 1980s. These groups help support to social inclusion of disabled people and help improve physical access in their communities. As one stakeholder observed:

> "Scotland has this network of joined up access panels, staffed by disabled people who volunteer their time for nothing other than improving accessibility in their local community, who have that lived experience. And it's frustrating when you see organisations and businesses still getting it wrong. […] Scotland shouldn't be in a position where we have built environments that are so detrimental to disabled people and have such an impact on their ability to live an independent life."

As this stakeholder emphasises, DAPs can involve considerable volunteer engagement and are engaged in a complicated process of seeking to influence the planning process to benefit disabled people. However, as the quote indicates, the recommendations of these panels are not necessarily always taken forward despite these efforts.

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[6] More information about Disability Access Panels can be found here: Access Panel Network - Access Panels in Scotland

Attitudes, including a lack of engagement with and consideration of disabled people in decision-making, was said to result in unintended consequences. An example given was a lack of representation at the planning stages of infrastructural projects with this leading to poor accessibility. However, the stakeholder emphasised the broader context of such examples in highlighting that disabled people have been historically underrepresented in all walks of life.

5.2.5 COVID-19 and the move online

The 'move online' that has followed the Covid-19 pandemic has important implications for rural populations.. Two stakeholders separately discussed how services and social opportunities were increasingly made available online for the LGBTI community. This was beneficial, in that it allowed rural LGBTI people to socialise and participate in online events and discussion groups that otherwise wouldn't have been able to in person. One stakeholder said that:

> "I think one of the benefits that have helped a lot of people living rurally is the ability to meet online. Because, before even COVID-19 they weren't able to meet with other individuals or groups, just because of where they were it is quite difficult to access those groups."

This may not be the case, however, for older members of the LGBTI community living rurally who face digital poverty or indeed those living in households that may not be accepting of diverse sexual orientations or gender identities. Related to this, poor internet connection in rural areas was also noted as an infrastructural barrier by stakeholders which could hamper access to online activity.

Counter to the positives of moving services online, one stakeholder spoke of how the online space has become an increasingly toxic place for the LGBTI community with rising transphobia, biphobia, lesbophobia, and homophobia. This may not be a comfortable place for some to engage with services or activities. The stakeholder also spoke of how COVID-19 resulted in the cutting of health services seen as essential to LGBTI people. This concern was also noted in the 'Further Out' report produced by the Equality Network, which observes that:

> "Health inequalities for the LGBTI population in rural Scotland have long existed. The Covid 19 pandemic has exacerbated these inequalities. This is most evident when looking at gender identity services and mental health related services that are necessary to aid in crisis." (Crowther et al., 2020: 74)

With respect to disabled people, one stakeholder described similarly how the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in events being held online instead of in person. This had the beneficial effect of being more accessible to those with a disability than prior. However, poor internet connectivity was, again, highlighted as an issue for those living in remote rural locations.

5.2.6 Minority stress

A final, and important, theme to emerge from the research was the experience and impact of minority stress[7]. This was expressed by one participant, who noted:

> "There's so many socio-cultural issues and all of these things add to a feeling of minority stress which in turn leads to low wellbeing, which in turn leads to poor mental health. Poor mental health leads to all kinds of issues all over the place, in terms of physical health, work, employment, all of the above"

Not only does this stress have an adverse effect on health, wellbeing, and outcomes in other aspects of life, it has wider consequences in relation to LGBTI people's participation in society as the following quote from the same stakeholder illustrates:

> "It's historical. We're not talking about just that people aren't being spoken to, we're talking about decades and decades of beating down and silencing, keeping in the closet and not being able to be open, as well as prejudice and misogyny. There's so much to it that stops people from being who they are and therefore being visible, and therefore getting involved in things, being out in the community, being able to speak, being able to recognise the challenges"

It is possible, moreover, that this experience extends to all disadvantaged groups here, and those that are protected under the Equality Act 2010 especially. Further research may be needed to provide a greater understanding of the impacts of minority stress in rural Scotland.

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[7] 'Minority Stress' has been described by the American Psychological Association as "…the relationship between minority and dominant values and resultant conflict with the social environment experienced by minority group members." See here. The concept was developed in relation to the experience of LGBTI experiences but has been extended to other minority groups. For further discussion see Baams et al. (2015).

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

As stated at the beginning of the report, this research aimed to:

a) Understand the rural experiences of four disadvantaged groups in Scotland;

b) Understand the barriers to participation these groups face in relation to rural policy and decision-making; and

c) Understand how these barriers to participation may be addressed.

The findings of this research suggest that the rural experiences of the communities of interest in Scotland often constitute barriers to participation in society more generally. These barriers to participation in society include:

- geographic isolation or being on the social periphery of a geographic community;
- a lack of appropriate and accessible services or infrastructure;
- a lack of social opportunities;
- the experience of "minority stress" and the historical continuation of marginalisation, prejudice and negative attitudes;
- the broader economic and social realities of rural life; and
- the lack of representation with regards to decision bodies.

In turn, it would seem that these barriers to participation in society feed into, and form the basis of, the barriers these communities of interest may face in relation to participation in rural policy and decision-making. The lack of participation in decision-making can have the unintended effect of reinforcing already existing barriers.

Stakeholders highlighted that, in their view, overcoming barriers to participation requires the initiative to be taken by those in positions of power, and should not fall on the shoulders of the disadvantaged groups themselves. This may be achieved through an active inclusion of groups in decision-making bodies or including the lived experience of these disadvantaged groups. However, as was noted by a stakeholder, economic participation is also critical, and wider policy mechanisms may be required to address these barriers.

6.1 Recommendation

This report has identified a range of ways in which communities of interest may face barriers to participation in rural Scotland, and how rurality itself may contribute to members of such communities feeling isolated. The broader context of this report is concerned with informing Scotland's rural movement and is supporting the ongoing work of Rural Economic and Community Development (RECD) and Scottish Rural Action to make the rural parliament and rural movement more inclusive.

In order to support this work that will be delivered through policy leads in Rural Community Policy Team, this report recommends exploring options for supporting communities of interest in rural communities. There may be a range of ways in which

this work could proceed, either building on the existing work of the Scottish Rural Network (SRN) and Equality Network, or via the development of a more specific network that focuses on rural equalities.

In turn, this would seek to support the articulation of the requirements of these communities in contexts where these voices need to be heard. This could include but not be limited to the Rural Parliament, and could also include consultations, participation in community budgeting efforts and other appropriate forums.

Critically, to determine the values and focus of the network, subsequent work would need to be driven by communities and those closest to the lived experience and delivered in collaboration with others. Rural Community Policy Team have liaised with Equality Unit on this and several wider initiatives, and will provide further policy advice and options after the Rural Parliament in March.

It is crucial that any future network should be appropriately targeted at community need and inclusive of community interests and existing effort. Therefore, further development of this idea should be a participatory project. Policy options and any costings on the above will be presented for consideration after further testing of the market and agreed buy in from others.

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