



Life in the countryside: rural idyll or rural disadvantage?

The countryside is often regarded as privileged and many urban dwellers aspire to move there, but research reveals hidden social exclusion that particularly affects young people, low paid workers and older residents in rural areas.

What are the research findings?

Rural social exclusion is characterised by:

- Poverty in work arising from low wages or when earned income is lost.
- Low pay being more persistent.
- Poverty amongst the self-employed.
- Lack of access to public transport, broadband and other services.
- Higher costs of fuel for domestic heating and for transport.
- A decline in informal support from neighbours and family.
- Lower uptake of welfare benefits.
- Unaffordable housing and welfare cuts forcing family members to move away, severing support networks.
- A loss of public spaces (eg POs) for maintaining social networks.
- Social isolation and a shortage of social care providers to support independent living for older people.
- Lack of recognition from other sectors of the population who regard the countryside as “a rural idyll”.

What are the implications for UK policy?

The rural economy and social fabric has many positive aspects, showing resilience in the downturn, but would be strengthened by:

- A change in attitudes and culture to ensure better awareness of rural disadvantage.
- Maintenance of spaces where people meet and access services.
- More investment in affordable housing and transport.
- Support for training and business start-ups via the Rural Growth Networks.
- Promoting awareness and uptake of welfare payments where there is entitlement.
- Ensuring policy is designed and implemented to meet the needs of rural as well as urban populations.

Further information:

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