



Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Sport NI

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

This is an investment into Special Olympics Ireland for the financial year 2026-30 for the purpose of providing sporting opportunities for people with a learning disability (delivered by Special Olympics Ulster).

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

The exchequer core funding of the delivery of services by Special Olympics Ulster for the period 2026-2030.

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The investment will deliver sporting activities to people with learning disability across Northern Ireland, with a particular focus on participation in sport, thereby improving physical and mental health, educational attainment, while supporting volunteers and helping to address social exclusion.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

X

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural.'

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes

No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The investment provided to Special Olympics Ireland will benefit Special Olympic clubs all over Northern Ireland. The benefits will be experienced by those Special Olympic clubs in rural areas, examples being Star Breakers Special Olympics Club in Carrickmore and Strabane Special Olympics Club who hold club activities in Sion Mills. There are also clubs in regional locations, such as Downpatrick and Coleraine, who will have many members from neighboring rural settlements. The Investment will also positively impact people with a learning disability in rural areas by improving health and wellbeing through sports participation.

The investment will also provide volunteering opportunities for those in rural areas through a dedicated volunteering campaign. Health and education opportunities will also be available and tackling the lack of social inclusion in rural areas will be an outcome.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The investment into Special Olympics covers all Northern Ireland, therefore the investment will benefit both rural areas and urban areas. There are 40 Special Olympic clubs in Northern Ireland offering a range of sports. The majority of these clubs may be in urban areas where there is more demand but there are clubs in rural areas and people with a learning disability living in those rural areas also can avail of club services in rural or neighboring urban settings. Special Olympics Ulster is cognisant of the needs of all their members, particularly around barriers to participation e.g., travel and cost, as a result they will ensure there are events and competitions in areas of high social need including rural areas. Special Olympics Ireland recognises the needs people with a learning disability particularly around barriers to participation, as a result they will ensure there are opportunities, events and competitions in areas of high social need including rural areas.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	Social Inclusion and Sports Development in rural areas.

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes

No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders

Published Statistics

Consultation with Other Organisations

Research Papers

Surveys or Questionnaires

Other Publications

Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

In the development of the Sport NI Corporate Plan 2020-25, an extensive consultation exercise was carried out, which captured feedback from all stakeholders and partners, including the general public.

The methodology for the engagement and public consultation phase of the development of the Sport NI Draft Corporate Plan 2020-2025 was to engage extensively, particularly with S75 and under-represented groups, new partners, non-sporting partners, as well as with traditional stakeholders. Sport NI took a collaborative, co-design, and problem-solving approach; to progress Sport NI's strategic approach to investment. Sport NI specifically consulted with DAERA, rural Councils, governing bodies, rural community, and sporting group and S75 groups. Sport NI also considered the Equality Impact Assessment conducted on the Corporate Plan, in particular evidence around rural isolation and barriers to participation in sport. [Equality-Impact-Assessment-Sport-NI-Corporate-Plan.pdf](#)

DAERA's Key Rural Issues Northern Ireland 2023 document, which focuses on nine domains of including connectivity and access to services which provide an insight of the issues facing people living in rural areas was considered. [Key Rural Issues | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

The Rural Policy Framework for NI Summary of Consultation findings has been considered, particularly the responses from challenges and opportunities facing people in rural areas over the next 5 years (2021-26)

[Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland Consultation | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

A summary of the social and economic needs are as follows, with more; more detail in appendix =one;1.

- A need to address social isolation.
- Diversity of opportunities in rural areas
- Limited reach in the West of the province
- More strategic engagement between organisations
- Utilisation on the natural environment and coastal areas
- Volunteer capacity in rural areas needs improved.
- Lack of public transport and regularity in rural areas.
- Requirement to have opportunities in rural areas advertised better.
- Need for the availability of health and wellbeing services in rural areas

The information provided highlights the issues facing people living in rural areas. Obviously, better access in relation to public transport would help this project, but creating more sporting opportunities in rural areas will be provided. Special Olympics Ireland contribute to this by ensuring events, competitions and health and wellbeing initiatives are scheduled not only in urban areas but also where possible in rural areas.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

N/A

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

The issues raised for people residing in rural areas included the following.

- Distance to travel to avail of sporting opportunities.
- Access to public transport (including regularity)
- Availability of physical activity opportunities in rural areas.

Feedback from Sport NI draft corporate plan 2020-25 consultation and in particular in relation to the Cornerstone to target sport in rural communities, in disadvantaged areas and with under-represented groups included the following:

- Rural isolation was a common issue.
- Reach of clubs to potential members in the west of the province
- Governing Bodies reach to councils in the West of the province.
- Limitations on the variety of opportunities available
- Volunteering capacity in rural areas is an issue.
- Utilisation of natural environment and coastal areas is important.

Sport NI's investment into Special Olympics Ireland will focus on providing opportunities to participate in sport for all areas in Northern Ireland, including those in rural areas. Relative work includes.

- 1) Special Olympics Ulster, through this investment, will aim to identify venues in rural areas to deliver up to sixteen different sports providing a variety of opportunities for rural dwellers with a learning disability.
- 2) Special Olympics Ulster will aim to provide club training opportunities in deprived areas, including rural areas, an example of this will be club opportunities in Sion Mills Bog Hall and Patrician Hall in Carrickmore. This will contribute to addressing the issues of lack of opportunities in the west of the province.
- 3) Special Olympics Ulster are increasing the variety of sports on offer in the programme and some of these will be rolled out in the rural areas and clubs in urban areas who cater for rural dwellers.
- 4) A recruitment campaign for volunteers with an aim to recruit new volunteers that will service all areas including rural clubs and events, again this will contribute to the issue of volunteering capacity in rural areas.
- 5) Delivery volunteer development training opportunities
- 6) Special Olympics Ulster will provide health and wellbeing programmes alongside with their sporting programmers for the benefit of Special Olympic athletes.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes

No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **5C**.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

This investment into Special Olympics Ireland is for the benefit of all people in Northern Ireland with an intellectual disability. Sport Northern Ireland and Special Olympics Ireland recognise that there is a particular issue around social exclusion not only with people with an intellectual disability but also with people who reside in rural areas.

This investment will aim to tackle social exclusion by providing sport health and education opportunities particularly in rural areas. Special Olympics Ireland aim to create new clubs which will cater for people in rural areas ensuring there is equal opportunity for all to benefit from the investment.

The investment into Special Olympics Ireland will contribute to addressing the needs and issues identified in this assessment report and will be monitored.

The plan will benefit people with a learning disability all over Northern Ireland, including those living in rural areas. The Rural Impact Assessment of each subsidiary programme, project or service will also consider this specifically and monitor impact.

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES** GO TO Section **6A**.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

n/a

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained, and relevant information compiled.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Ian Weir & Niall O'Neill
Position/Grade:	Sports Culture & Integrity Manager & Sport Developer
Division/Branch:	Sport NI
Signature:	N.O'Neill
Date:	08.01.26
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Rebecca Hope
Position/Grade:	Interim Director of Sport (G6)
Division/Branch:	Sport NI
Signature:	R. Hope
Date:	04.02.2026