

KILDARE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE STRATEGY 2025-2027



County Kildare
LEADER PARTNERSHIP

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CARO	Climate Action Regional Office
CFI	Community Foundation Ireland
CE	Community Employment
CSP	Community Services Programme
CKLP	County Kildare LEADER Partnership
DAF	Dormant Account Fund
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
DSP	Department of Social Protection
ESG	Environment, Social, and Governance
EU	European Union
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HSE	Health Service Executive
ILDN	Irish Local Development Network
KWETB	Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board
KCCC	Kildare County Childcare Committee
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
NACEC	National Association of Community Enterprise Centres
PPN	Public Participation Network
RDP	Rural Development Programme
RSS	Rural Social Scheme
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SEI	Social Entrepreneurs Ireland
SERI	Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
WISE	Work Integration Social Enterprises

**INTERACTIVE
DOCUMENT**

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Executive Summary

County Kildare's social enterprise sector faces a blend of challenges and opportunities. While a long-standing social economy exists, the ecosystem is hindered by limited public awareness, an unclear distinction between social and community enterprises, and insufficient support networks. The lack of corporate services, training, and scalable funding disproportionately affects smaller enterprises. Additionally, new social enterprises are rare, and the sector's reliance on temporary employment schemes further compounds its vulnerability. Addressing these issues is critical to realising the full potential of social enterprises in fostering local economic development and social innovation.

The 2025–2027 Social Enterprise Strategy for Kildare, spearheaded by County Kildare LEADER Partnership, offers a comprehensive framework to strengthen the social enterprise sector. This strategy focuses on five strategic pillars: raising awareness, growing and sustaining social enterprises, supporting the green transition, fostering national and international engagement, and enhancing impact measurement. Key actions include developing bespoke support programmes, creating a social enterprise network, promoting resource-sharing, integrating environmental sustainability initiatives, and fostering collaborations with academic and policy stakeholders.

The strategy aligns with both national and EU policy frameworks, positioning Kildare as a hub of social innovation. By addressing identified weaknesses and

leveraging opportunities like increased consumer demand for sustainable practices and promoting the local economy, the plan promises tangible economic and social benefits. It aims to empower local entrepreneurs, reduce dependency on grants, and attract diverse investments. The focus on environmental sustainability and cross-sectoral collaborations also enhances Kildare's capacity to lead a just green transition, contributing to broader societal goals such as reducing inequality and promoting inclusive growth.



Successful implementation requires a coordinated effort among public, private, and community stakeholders. Immediate next steps include initiating pilot projects to test proposed actions, launching awareness campaigns, and establishing a multi-stakeholder implementation approach. The strategy's ultimate success will depend on sustained collaboration, adequate funding, and adaptive learning to refine initiatives based on measurable outcomes. With these efforts, Kildare can become a model of how social enterprises drive inclusive and sustainable local development.

1. Introduction

1.1 County Kildare LEADER Partnership

County Kildare LEADER Partnership is the local development company responsible for the delivery of a range of Rural, Enterprise, Social Inclusion and Community Development Initiatives in County Kildare. These initiatives are carried out through the Rural Development Programme (LEADER), the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and other supporting programmes empowering local communities to improve their quality of life.

Recognising the impact of social enterprises on the local area, County Kildare LEADER Partnership has proactively sought to provide much needed support to social enterprises in Kildare. This support provision is continued through direct interventions, including grant aid, training initiatives, and capacity building, as well as the establishment of a social enterprise network for the county in 2024.

The following support initiatives have been delivered by CKLP to increase Kildare's social economy.

- **2018:** Social Enterprise Training Programme (LEADER funded and delivered by the Irish Social Finance Centre)
- **2019-2020:** Dormant Accounts Fund Small Capital Grants
- **2020-2021:** Dormant Accounts Fund Social Enterprise Training and Mentoring Programme
- **2021-2022:** Social Enterprise COVID-19 Regeneration Programme Training and Mentoring
- **2022:** Dormant Accounts Fund ARISE Social Enterprise Awareness and Publicity Programme



1.2 Kildare's First Social Enterprise Strategy

The spirit of social enterprise and social innovation are embedded in the social economy in Ireland, acting as a pillar for strengthening the economy within Ireland and internationally. In recent years social enterprise has become a crucial aspect of the Irish government's plans for redeveloping the business economy, specifically following the COVID-19 pandemic.



Recognising this contribution the Government of Ireland published the first National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland (2019-2022) aimed at developing the potential of social enterprise and bringing awareness to the sector. Since then, significant public awareness and investment to strengthen the social enterprise sector has succeeded in highlighting the role of social enterprise, not only in strengthening the economy, but in mitigating the stress placed on public service providers.

Despite social enterprise operating across a wide range of sectors in both urban and rural areas, the concentration of social enterprises in specific sectors is greater in rural areas. 43% of social enterprises in Ireland operate in or for rural communities (Department of Rural

and Community Development, 2023). In its 2024-2027 strategy, Trading for Impact, the DRCD acknowledged the role of local and regional level action in supporting the particular needs of rural and regional social enterprises.

County Kildare LEADER Partnership seeks to support social enterprise and empower communities of social entrepreneurs to promote inclusion, create sustainable rural development, and define the just green transition for the county. This strategy was created to inspire and support social enterprises in County Kildare and transform the county into a hub of social innovation, supporting the implementation of national and local policy.

In 2023, in response to the growing social economy in Kildare, County Kildare LEADER Partnership commissioned **Method Consultants** to engage in a consultation process to map the social enterprise eco-system across County Kildare. The results of the mapping formed the basis of this strategy document. In the early sections of the document, relevant EU and National policies that influence the social enterprise sector are outlined along with resources available to support social innovation. The findings of the consultation are then examined to determine the opportunities and challenges facing Kildare's social enterprise sector.

Building on the strengths and challenges identified, this strategy sets out County Kildare LEADER Partnership's ambition and vision to develop the social enterprise ecosystem in County Kildare and outlines strategic objectives to be actioned to achieve this vision.

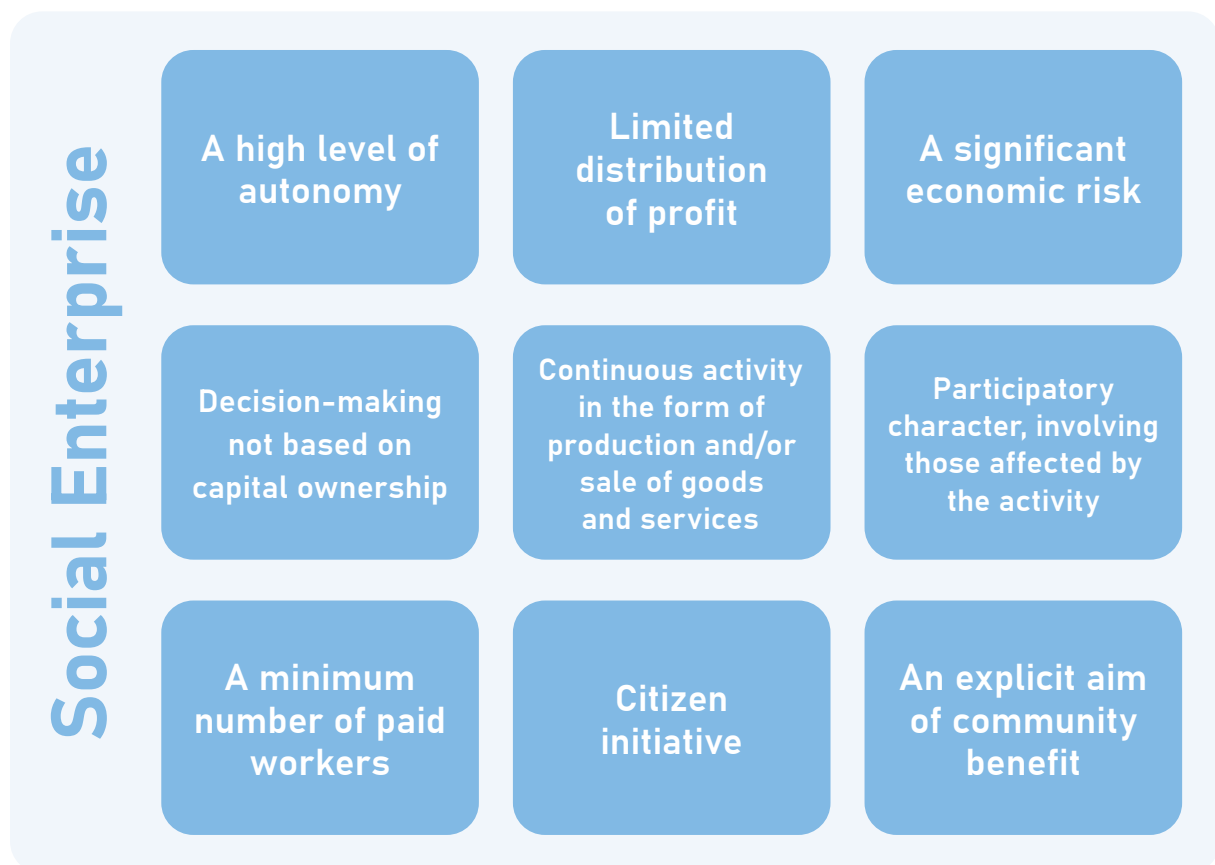
2. Social Enterprise

2.1 Defining Social Enterprise

2.1.1 European Definition

The European Commission's 2020 mapping of social enterprises and their eco-systems in Europe¹ highlighted that of the 28 countries studied, 20 have a national definition of social enterprise. There is no European-wide definition of a social enterprise resulting in variations and interpretations of social enterprise.

The European research network, EMES², has based its definition of social enterprise on four economic and five social criteria³.



¹ European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Carini, C., Borzaga, C., Chiomento, S., Franchini, B. et al., *Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe – Comparative synthesis report*, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/567551>

² EMES is an international research network of established university research centres and individual researchers whose goal has been so far to gradually build up an international corpus of theoretical and empirical knowledge, pluralistic in disciplines and methodologies, around social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, social economy, solidarity economy and social innovation.

³ Defourny, Jacques & Nyssens, M. (2006). *Defining Social Enterprise. Social Enterprise: At the Crossroads of Market, Public Policies and Civil Society*.

Table 1: Economic and Social Criteria that Forms the Basis of EMES' Definition of Social Enterprise

Economic and social criteria that forms the basis of EMES' definition of social enterprise	
Economic Criteria	Social Criteria
• Continuous activity in the form of production and/or sale of goods and services: unlike traditional not-for-profit organisations, social enterprises do not normally undertake advocacy work; instead, they produce goods and services. • A high level of autonomy: social enterprises are created voluntarily by groups of citizens and are governed by them. Public authorities or private companies have no direct or indirect control over them, even though grant funding may be provided by these organisations. • A significant economic risk: the financial viability of social enterprises depends on the efforts of their members, who have the responsibility of ensuring financial resources are either secured or generated from trading activity, unlike most public institutions. • A minimum number of paid workers are required, although, like traditional non-profit organisations, social enterprises may combine financial and non-financial resources, voluntary and paid work.	• An explicit aim of community benefit: the principal aim of social enterprises is to serve the community or a specific group of people. • Citizen initiative: social enterprises are the result of collective interaction involving people belonging to a community or to a group that shares a certain need or aim. • Decision-making not based on capital ownership: this generally means the principle of 'one member, one vote', or at least a voting power not based on capital shares. Although capital owners in social enterprises can play an important role, decision-making rights are shared with other shareholders. • Participatory character, involving those affected by the activity: the users of social enterprises' services are represented and participate in their structures. In many cases, one of the objectives is to strengthen democracy at local level through economic activity. • Limited distribution of profit: social enterprises include organisations that totally prohibit profit distribution as well as organisations such as co-operatives, which may distribute their profit only to a limited degree, thus avoiding profit-maximising behaviour.



The EMES' definition outlines key characteristics of social enterprises. The characteristics outline that a social enterprise:

- must hold priority of the trading element and how it differs from NGOs and community organisations that are engaged in advocacy or charity.
- must serve the community and be independent of the state. The governance structures may include external expertise (involving the State or the private sector) with the sole motivation being the development of the social enterprise.
- differ from private enterprises as they belong to the community they serve.
- unlike charities, should endeavour to promote service user involvement in all levels of its decision-making.
- is limited by profit maximisation.

2.1.2 Definition in the Irish Context

Due to varying definitions of social entrepreneurship and a gap in specific regulation, it can be challenging to understand what constitutes a social enterprise and how a social enterprise differs from a commercially operating enterprise. Social enterprises are neither charitable organisations nor pure for-profit enterprises, operating on a model between the two. They trade in goods and services and use any profits generated to deliver social impact. The more profitable a social enterprise is, the greater the impact it can have. It is only since 2019, that a definition of social enterprise has been introduced in the Irish context.

While social enterprises can span a number of different objectives, the following forms of social enterprise are specified in Ireland's policy:

- Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs), which support disadvantaged people to prepare for, and participate in, the labour market.
- Enterprise Development social enterprises which support the creation of other enterprises (e.g. through the provision of office space and facilities).
- 'Deficient Demand' social enterprises which seek to meet a demand for goods and services within a community where there is insufficient demand for the operation of a regular market due to inherent economic and social disadvantage or low density of population.
- Environmental social enterprises which focus on environmental sustainability.
- Social enterprises contracted with the public sector to deliver public services in disadvantaged areas and communities.

The National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 provided social enterprises operating in Ireland with the first national definition. Trading for Impact the National Social Enterprise Policy 2024- 2027 further specified defining aspects of a social enterprise providing the following updated Irish definition:

"A social enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders. It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and / or services, and by reinvesting surpluses fully or primarily into achieving social objectives. It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner and is independent of the public sector. If dissolved, it should transfer its assets to another organisation with a similar mission."

2.2 Mapping Kildare's Social Enterprise Ecosystem

The first comprehensive baseline data collection exercise of the social enterprise sector in the Republic of Ireland published in 2023, provided the first county by county overview of active social enterprises in Ireland. The baseline data estimates approximately 67 social enterprises in County Kildare (based on broadly interpreted self-reported data)⁴. Kildare, and other counties bordering Dublin, have the lowest number of social enterprises per inhabitants with records identifying 2.7 social enterprises per 10,000 Kildare inhabitants⁵.

Adopting the 2019 definition of a social enterprise, profiling of the social enterprises in Kildare was undertaken to map the county's social enterprise sector. The profiling which collated information based on consultations, engagement with County Kildare LEADER Partnership and local knowledge, identified 25 social enterprises who engaged with the mapping. Of the 25 social enterprises, all but two were engaging in some form of trading activity.

FORM AND GOVERNANCE

In the context of a social enterprise, an organisation is typically a profit-seeking organisation but seeks and uses that profit in order to advance its social, societal or environmental purpose, rather than enabling its members and investors to profit from the business, as is the case with purely commercial concerns. As there is no tailored legal form for social enterprises under Irish law, the forming and governance of a social enterprise is determined by the aims of operating, and purpose of the enterprise. In this study, community

childcare initiatives were not included in the mapping exercise, as they do not come within the remit of this strategy (as they come within the remit of the Kildare County Childcare Committee (KCCC)).

Of the 25 social enterprises in the county that were mapped, 22 are incorporated using the legal form of Company Limited by Guarantee. One enterprise is registered as a cooperative (Industrial and Provident Society) and one is an Association. All but three are registered as charities.

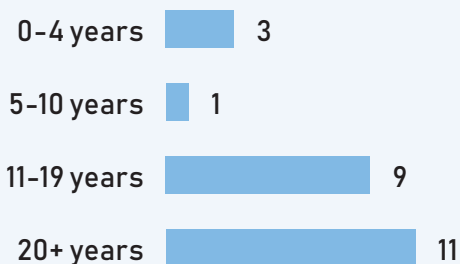
The 22 social enterprises incorporated as CLG are governed by 162 directors (an average of 7.4 directors per social enterprise).

NUMBER OF YEARS IN EXISTENCE

As indicated in the graph below, in the last four years, only three new social enterprises were formed in Kildare. Of these three, two are not yet trading (or incorporated)⁶. The social enterprise sector in Kildare is dominated by long standing enterprises with over ten years of experience operating in the local area.

Figure 1: Years of Establishment of Social Enterprises in Kildare

NUMBER OF YEARS ESTABLISHED



⁴ For example, in the case of Section 38, Section 39 and Section 56 health/social care organisations and sporting organisations, it was agreed that where these organisations were identified by social enterprise support organisations and/or completed the survey and self-declared as social enterprises, they were included.

⁵ Amárach Research, SERI and ILDN (2023) *Social Enterprises in Ireland A Baseline Data Collection Exercise*. Dublin: DRCD

⁶ Based on the date of incorporation of legal structure, rather than the establishment of the group that formed the social enterprise.

ACTIVITIES

The national baseline study, identified the following four sectors as having the most social enterprises (68%):

- Childcare
- Community Infrastructure and Local Development
- Health, Youth Services and Social Care
- Heritage festivals, Arts and Creative industry.

Kildare's social enterprise eco-system is consistent with that of the national eco-system, particularly in relation to the number of community centres of which, Kildare has eight operating as social

enterprises. Additionally, Kildare has a significant number of social enterprises dedicated to youth theatre and arts. Documented in Figure 2 is an overview of the main activities defining Kildare's social economy.

Many social enterprises in Kildare engage in multiple activities. This is consistent with the national baseline study which found that social enterprises citing community infrastructure and local development as their principal economic activity, declared the greatest number of multiple activities, averaging approximately five.

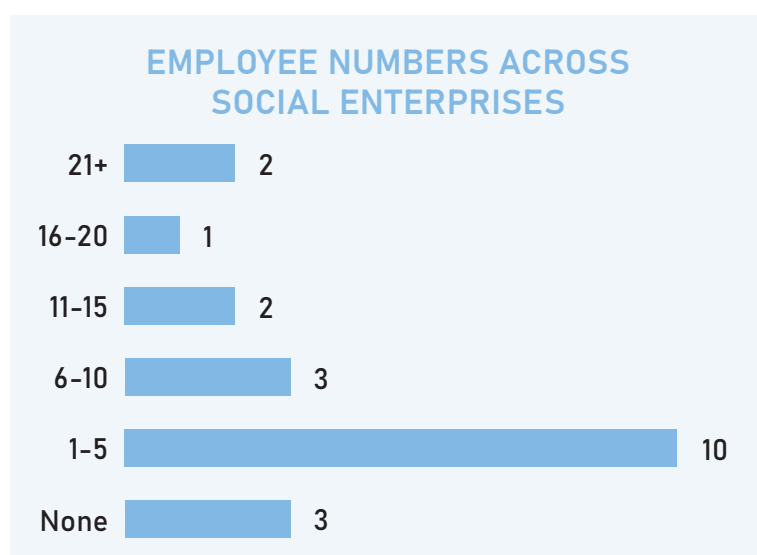
Figure 2: Main Activities of Social Enterprises in Kildare



NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Social enterprise accounts for 3.7% of the workforce in Ireland. Analysis of the workforce in Kildare revealed that a total of 151 (in both full-time and part-time capacities) staff were employed across 21 social enterprises. This data is based on the annual returns of social enterprises, and reference is made to the number of individuals employed. Figure 3 sets out categories of employees across these social enterprises – most social enterprises that have employees (18 social enterprises) employ between one and five individuals. This provides further analysis of the categorisation of the county's social enterprise sector. Considering a standardised classification of enterprises in terms of size, all (100%) of the organisations surveyed in the mapping can be classified as small or microenterprises, employing less than 49 people, including voluntary work.

Figure 3: Number of Employees Employed by Social Enterprises in Kildare



FINANCIAL STATUS

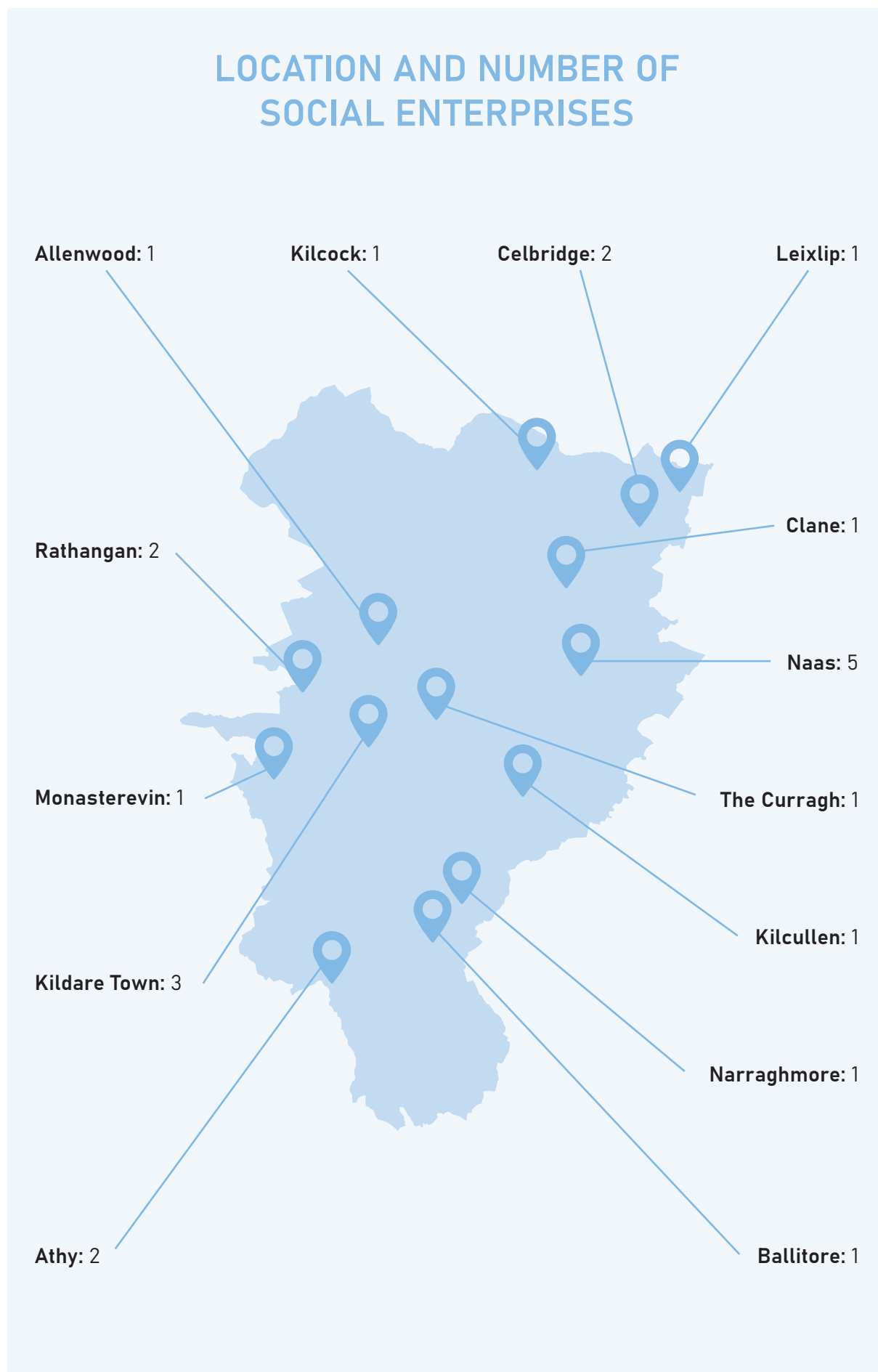
Over €6.6 million euro (€6,606,788) in annual turnover was generated collectively for 18 of the 23 trading social enterprises. This is an average turnover of €367,044 per social enterprise. This is significantly higher than the national average figure: the national baseline study found that the median annual income for a social enterprise in Ireland is €180,000 (and increases to €253,529 in urban social enterprises whereas for rural social enterprises, it is €80,317).

The figure below outlines the turnover ranges for social enterprises – indicating how wide-ranging the sector is in terms of turnover size. Almost 40% of mapped social enterprises generated a turnover of over €200,000, which is significantly higher than the national norm.

Table 2: Income Categories of Social Enterprises in Kildare

Annual Turnover and Categories of Social Enterprises in County Kildare			
Income Categories	No. SEs (in Kildare)	% of SEs (in Kildare)	% of SEs (National)
0 – 50K	2	11%	28.8%
50 – < 100K	4	22%	10.7%
100 – < 250K	6	33%	19.3%
250 – < 500K	2	11%	17.3%
500K to < €1 million	2	11%	11.9%
€1 million to < €5 million	2	11%	10.5%
Greater than €5 million	0	0%	1.4%

Figure 4: Geographical Distribution of Social Enterprises in Kildare



3. Policy Framework Defining this Strategy

3.1 EU Policy Framework

A growing realisation at EU level of the need to formally recognise and support the role of social enterprise has resulted in policy development from the EU and within member states. In October 2011, the European Commission issued a Communication entitled Social Business Initiative: Creating a favourable climate for social enterprises, key stakeholders in the social economy and innovation, stating:

"Social enterprises contribute to smart growth by responding with social innovation to needs that have not yet been met; they create sustainable growth by taking into account their environmental impact and by their long-term vision; they are at the heart of inclusive growth due to their emphasis on people and social cohesion."

Further enhancing this role, the EU's socio-economic strategy for the period 2010-2020, emphasised the importance of

'social innovation' in achieving employment growth and development, outlining a just green transition, and a reduction in poverty and social exclusion. In this context, social entrepreneurs and social enterprises are seen as 'key drivers' of social innovation and require supporting policy to enhance their delivery of social innovation. The Social Economy Action Plan adopted by the European Commission in 2021 puts forward concrete measures to help mobilise the full potential of the sector, and aims to enhance social investment, and support social economy actors and social enterprises to start-up, scale-up, innovate and create employment.

On December 4th, 2020, Ireland signed up to the Toledo Declaration with 19 other EU member states. The Declaration is a recognition and a commitment to strengthening the decisive role that Social Enterprises can play as the EU emerges from the health, economic, and social crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.





3.2 Policy in Ireland

3.2.1 National Social Enterprise Policy For Ireland 2019-2022 And Trading For Impact: The National Social Enterprise Policy For Ireland 2024-2027

Under the Action Plan for Rural Development, the Government committed to developing a national policy on social enterprise. In 2019, the Department published its *National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022*, the first national policy on the sector. The policy is part of a suite of policy initiatives which will complement the Department's *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024* and the *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025*.

The first social enterprise policy focused on three objectives:

- Building awareness of social enterprise
- Growing and strengthening social enterprise
- Achieving better policy alignment

In July 2024, the DRCD launched Trading for Impact: The National Social Enterprise Policy 2024-2027. This policy acts as a central blueprint for growing and sustaining the social enterprise sector in Ireland. Acknowledging the role social enterprise will play in the broader economy, this policy outlines five objectives, namely:

1. Building Awareness of Social Enterprise
2. Growing and Sustaining Social Enterprise
3. Supporting the Green Transition
4. National and International Engagement
5. Impact Measurement

The policy provides an overview of the social enterprise eco-system in Ireland and details 57 concrete actions for sustainable growth of the social enterprise sector under the 5 objectives.

3.2.2 Baseline Study of Social Enterprises

The Department of Rural and Community Development, (DRCD) commissioned a national baseline data on social enterprises in Ireland which was completed by Amárach research, Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI) and the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN).

Key findings show that:

- **3.7% (84,382 people)** of the Irish workforce are employed within the **4,335** active social enterprises in Ireland.
- **74,824** volunteers work in social enterprises, including **30,324** board members.
- In 2021, income generated by social enterprise (**€2.34 billion**) represented **0.63%** of Ireland's GDP.
- **15%** of the social enterprises in Ireland operate internationally as well as nationally.
- **43%** of social enterprises are located in rural areas.
- **68%** of social enterprises are concentrated in 4 sectors: childcare; community infrastructure and local development; health, youth services and social care; and heritage festivals, arts and creative industry.
- Almost half of the workforce is between the ages of 31 and 50. Women represent **69%** of the workforce across the sector, and **47%** of the workforce is part-time.
- Most (**64%**) derive their income from a mix of trading goods/services and government grants.
- Half of the surveyed social enterprises (**49%**) have been in operation for more than 20 years.
- Data from emergent social enterprises (established in the last four years) indicates they are especially relevant in sectors of activity such as training and work, integration and environmental services.



3.2.3 Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland over the next five years. The policy contains several measures that specifically address the role of social enterprise in rural development. These measures include:

- Delivering a suite of new measures to support the development of social enterprises in rural areas to increase their social, economic and environmental impact and contribute to job creation locally
- Promoting the greater use of socially responsible public procurement contracts, where feasible, which will incentivise the engagement of social enterprises and circular economy organisations
- Examining the establishment of a Community Ownership Fund to help community groups and social enterprises buy or takeover local community assets at risk of being lost to run as community businesses.

3.3 Local Frameworks

3.3.1 County Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan

Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is a statutory plan provided for in the Local Government Act 2014. The purpose of the LECP is to outline the priorities to promote and support economic and community development in Kildare. Within the Implementation Plan 2024-2027 social enterprises are prioritised within action 2.7, To promote local entrepreneurship through models of clustering and support

their ongoing development through integrated, accessible support services targeting micro, small business and social enterprises across the county. The development of this county-wide social enterprise strategy endeavours to strengthen the vision for Kildare's economic development as outlined in the LECP, under activity 2.14.4 and that of the Local Development Strategy.



3.3.2 Social Enterprise Stakeholders in Kildare

The Irish and EU Governments administer a range of programmes and strategies that specifically target social enterprise. Table 3 outlines some of these support mechanisms.

Table 3: Supporting Mechanisms available to Social Enterprises in Kildare

Supporting Mechanisms for Social Enterprise	
Category	Example
SICAP	The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is a key intervention for disadvantaged communities, offering support to individuals and local community groups. The SICAP programme to date has included provision for supporting social enterprise, under Goal 1. The new SICAP programme started in January 2024.
Staff/labour Market Supports	The Community Services Programme (CSP) is administered by Pobal on behalf of the DRCD. The aim of the CSP is to support community organisations to provide local social, economic, and environmental services. It is a dedicated support for social enterprises and provides employment grants to over 420 community organisations in Ireland. The CSP was reviewed in 2019-2020 and has recently introduced changes to the level of salary funding to projects, based on the financial circumstances of existing beneficiaries. A limited call for new projects was issued in 2023. Labour market programmes operated by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) include Community Employment (CE) programme, which also provides supervisor grants, materials grants and training grants; Rural Social Scheme (RSS) and Tús (the latter two being implemented by local development companies). They offer part-time placements to those who are long-term unemployed or underemployed (farmers and fishermen/women) in rural areas with community initiatives.
LEADER Funding	The Rural Development Programme (LEADER) provides a combination of capital supports, training, and other supports. LEADER funding is open to community groups and small to medium enterprises interested in developing social enterprises, and it funds such initiatives in the areas of tourism, renewable energy, crafts and artisan food production, and services for hard-to-reach communities. Funding of up to 75% for capital projects and other supports (to a maximum level of €200,000, or where a community group has no economic activity €500,000), and training programmes are eligible. The new RDP programme will run until 2028.
Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF)	The Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) provides capital and other funding targeting specific groups, including people with disabilities, communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and those who are educationally disadvantaged.

Community Finance Ireland and Rethink	In 2022, CFI and Rethink announced a proposed new 'hybrid' financial support for social enterprises, combining a 50% loan (repayable) finance and 50% non-repayable finance (with additional soft supports available to recipients of the finance). The programme is delivered in collaboration between the DRCD, Rethink and CFI.
Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Kildare	LEOs can offer 'soft' support in the form of training and mentoring to social enterprises. Regarding financial support, these are available from LEOs for micro-enterprises operating in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors.
Support for Community Energy Production	The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) provides funding to community organisations to reduce the reliance of their communities on fossil fuels, as part of the Sustainable Energy Community programme. It is funding a network of over 130 communities around Ireland that are pursuing community energy production.

Additionally, there are sector-specific funding programmes which can be accessed by some social enterprises. For example, programmes for community centres are accessed by social enterprises as well as mainstream enterprises (for example, the Community Centre Investment Fund).

3.3.3 Social Enterprise Networks

Below are some of the national networks operating in Ireland. A number focus on the membership's shared economic activity, while others have a general and national remit:

- The Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI) was established in 2020 and is the newest network of stakeholders with a specific interest in social enterprise, formed to promote the concept of social enterprise in Ireland (www.socialenterprise.ie). While it is a multi-stakeholder forum, it includes a practitioner council, with membership in social enterprises.
- The Irish Social Enterprise Network aims to enhance the visibility of social enterprise in Ireland (www.socent.ie).
- The Community Recycling Network Ireland is the all-island representative community-based body for community-based reuse, recycling and waste prevention organisations (www.crni.ie).
- The National Association of Community Enterprise Centres (NACEC) is a network of 120 community enterprise centres in the Republic of Ireland. Its primary role is to support and develop the interests of community enterprise centres on a national basis (www.enterprisecentres.ie).

4. Analysis of Kildare's Social Enterprise Sector

4.1 Challenges Facing Kildare's Social Enterprise Sector

Analysis of the consultations with key stakeholders and social enterprises has provided an overview of the many factors impeding the development of the county's social enterprise sector.

THE KEY FACTORS INCLUDE:

- A strong social economy is evident in County Kildare, however the lines between social enterprise and community enterprise are unclear.
- There is low or non-existent growth of new social enterprises while the demand for support often provided by social enterprises is increasing.
- Early-stage or smaller social enterprises struggle to seek funding from banks/ investors to scale up and while heavily reliant on grants, donations and volunteer support, do not have the capacity to apply for the relevant support.
- There is no support network for social enterprises to share knowledge and support each other.
- Social enterprises are often overlooked when it comes to enterprise support heightened by undefined roles from support entities i.e. Local Enterprise Office, County Council, and County Kildare LEADER Partnership.
- A lack of awareness and promotion of social enterprise and social enterprise activity.
- A lack of training and scale-up support is provided regionally. For small social enterprises, participating in programmes offered by Rethink and HEIs is not feasible as staff size is small and resources are tight.



4.2 SWOT Analysis

Table 4: SWOT Analysis of Kildare's Social Enterprise Sector

SWOT Analysis	
Strengths	Weaknesses
• Long-standing social enterprise sector in the county. • Increased interest in social enterprise activities. • Cross-sectorial initiatives. • National definition and focused policy improve opportunities. • Vibrant start-up environment and improvement in start-up infrastructure.	• County-wide lack of awareness around the social enterprise sector. • Differing interpretations of a social enterprise (specifically around trading threshold). • Greater need for future-proofing and limited access to financial planning. • Lack of corporate services i.e. HR, IT, Compliance, Procedure. • Low levels of volunteerism or disincentives.
Opportunities	Threats
• National and European Funding Initiatives for social enterprise. • Partnership with Maynooth University as HEI within the county. • Opportunity to engage in the Just Green Transition and the Just Transition Fund. • Strong community centre eco-system creates potential for digital hubs and co-working. • Desire from consumers to shop sustainably.	• Unattractive sector to work in. • Over-reliance on employment schemes and temporary employment positions. • Cost of living crisis increasing the need for social enterprise but reducing the availability of income. • Migration of the working population may lead to drain on available staff. • Unclear definition of the supporting services and where to access resources.

Analysing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing Kildare's social enterprise sector has presented the following key takeaways:

- While many of the active social enterprises in Kildare are considered micro-enterprises, Kildare's social enterprise sector is experienced and long-standing.
- There is a county-wide lack of awareness around social enterprise which is consistent with that on a national level.
- There is significant potential to expand Kildare's social enterprise sector specifically focusing on climate action, circular economy, and the just transition.
- The over-reliance of employment schemes and support, paired with the unattraction to work in the sector creates a volatile environment for sustaining a social enterprise long term.

5. Vision and Objectives

Social enterprises lack infrastructure and support in the market. The gap is wide compared with the support available to for-profit startups. Developing local support and capacity in social enterprise should focus on attracting new social entrepreneurs, investments, and awareness for projects. It will also help to invigorate rural communities, increase demand for services from social enterprises, and create a social innovation region.

The implementation of the strategy will be driven by the County Kildare LEADER Partnership, and is dependent on:

- The cooperation and collaboration of all agencies that interact with, engage with and provide services for social enterprises
- Access to additional resources

5.1 Strategic Actions

The strategic plan below outlines key strategic actions which should be undertaken in County Kildare for the 2025-2027 period. The strategic objectives are mapped against the policy objectives set out in the National Social Enterprise Policy 2024-2027 which are:

1. **Building Awareness of Social Enterprises**
2. **Growing and Sustaining Social Enterprise**
3. **Supporting the Green Transition**
4. **National and International Engagement**
5. **Impact Measurement**



5.1.1 Building Awareness of Social Enterprises

Strategic Objective – Expand Awareness Among Key Stakeholders and Public			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Expand Community Engagement – Engage with community organisations and networks to raise their awareness of the potential to collaborate or be supported by a social enterprise through the delivery of town hall events.	✓	✓	✓
Collaborate with education bodies, start your own business providers, and commercial business training providers delivering enterprise training to promote local social enterprise examples, embed case studies into the curriculum, and provide site visits for business students to raise their awareness of social entrepreneurship.	✓	✓	✓
Leverage digital platforms and content to implement a sustained digital storytelling campaign highlighting success stories, using social media, video platforms, and print media.	✓	✓	
Enhance engagement with youth clubs and youth-centric groups, Schools Completion Programme and transition year students to foster early awareness of the social economy and social entrepreneurship amongst young people and youth workers.		✓	✓
Deliver a 'Shop Social' initiative, partnering with local businesses, institutions, and suppliers to promote social enterprise products and services bringing awareness to Kildare's social enterprise sector.	✓	✓	✓

Strategic Objective – Building Awareness Among the Public and Private Sector			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Network with state bodies to bring further awareness and support to the needs of social enterprises through the social enterprise working group.	✓	✓	
Engage with the corporate sector to identify actions that can be taken to support the social economy.		✓	✓
Engage with the ILDN through the Social Economy Working Group and with the Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI) to build an awareness of Kildare's social enterprise sector.	✓	✓	✓

5.1.2 Growing and Sustaining Social Enterprise

Strategic Objective – Provide Dedicated Supports to Social Enterprises			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Develop a bespoke social enterprise support programme offering modular training and support tailored to ideation, scaling, and leadership, with added resilience and well-being components.	✓	✓	✓
Explore the potential for flexible funding models seeking to establish a revolving fund and highlight organisations offering micro-loans or bridging loans to small-scale and start up social enterprises.	✓	✓	✓

Strategic Objective – Enhance the Capacity of Existing Social Enterprises			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Convening of Social Enterprise Network for existing and new social enterprises in Kildare.	✓	✓	✓
Provide Masterclass webinars on topics such as Social Justice, and Financial Justice, as well as organising site visits to social enterprises operating nationally and internationally.		✓	✓
Strengthen capacity through collaboration, facilitating peer-to-peer mentoring and workshops with established social enterprises locally, nationally, and internationally.		✓	✓

Strategic Objective – Identify New Social Enterprise Opportunities			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Identify social enterprise initiatives happening in community groups across Kildare, which could be scaled up and reorganised into a social enterprise through trading – groups such as Men's Sheds and Women's Groups.	✓	✓	✓
Develop a 'Start your own Social Enterprise' training programme in collaboration with Local Enterprise Office.	✓		
Explore the possibility of creating resource-sharing networks seeking to establish a shared service model for compliance, HR, and governance. Needs to reduce operational burden options, and feasibility of a 'shared service' for insurance, compliance, governance, and HR (through funding, mentoring or in-kind supports) to provide support to boards.	✓	✓	

5.1.3 Supporting the Green Transition

Strategic Objective – Advance ESG Integration and Community Action			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Build ESG awareness from the ground up providing tailored workshops on renewable energy, waste reduction, circular practices, and sustainable procurement practices.	✓	✓	✓
Partner with communities to co-design climate action projects that can evolve into social enterprises.		✓	✓
Explore the potential for Sustainable Energy Communities across the county led by clusters of Social Enterprises.		✓	✓

Strategic Objective – Supporting a Just Green Transition for Kildare			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Work on a collaborative basis with existing supports to develop a strategic approach to supporting social enterprises with climate action objectives, and to ensure that the supports under SICAP, LEADER and Community Climate Action fund are complementary.	✓	✓	✓
Support Kildare County Council to develop the Circular Economy hub and growth of social enterprise in South Kildare.		✓	✓
Engage with the CARO to identify how they can increase their engagement with social enterprises.	✓		



5.1.4 National and International Engagement

Strategic Objective – Adopt a Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Implement the Strategy			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Seek commitments, supports and resources from public, private and third sector sources to deliver actions in this strategy.	✓		
Explore the potential for a multi-stakeholder group to drive the delivery of the strategy – public, private and education sector and enterprise development organisations, who will take a key role in championing social enterprise or delivering some actions. This implementation group would meet approximately twice annually.	✓	✓	✓

Strategic Objective – Build Global and National Connections			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Create exchange programmes and facilitate visits and knowledge-sharing with international social enterprises to adopt best practices.		✓	✓

5.1.5 Impact Measurement

Strategic Objective – Adopt a Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Implement the Strategy			
Actions	2025	2026	2027
Initiate discussions with third-level institutions around potential programmes and research initiatives that could support the implementation of an evidence-based social impact measurement programme.		✓	
Explore accessible impact measurement and develop a user-friendly toolkit adaptable to varying enterprise sizes and sectors, with pilot testing and feedback incorporation.		✓	
Explore the potential for a social enterprise mark to award social impact delivered by social enterprises operating in Kildare similar to the Business Working Responsibly Mark.		✓	✓

5.2 Implementation

Implementing the actions that emerge from this strategy shall come within the overall remit of County Kildare LEADER Partnership and will require implementation mechanisms and partners. The issue of responsible organisations must also be addressed however this strategy aims to develop such interagency mechanisms to enhance Kildare's social enterprise support.

Given the local development context that County Kildare LEADER Partnership works within, it may be possible for partner organisations to take a lead in

some of the actions to be developed. Some actions may need to be piloted with specific thematic social enterprise areas, and once successful County Kildare LEADER Partnership could advocate for their replication across other areas.

The impact of this strategy relies on the potential of cross-sectorial support, implementing partners, and the desire to develop the social enterprise sector in County Kildare. Such implementing partners may include the following organisations, governing bodies, and authorities.

Table 5: Potential Implementation Partners

Potential Implementing Partners and Support Mechanisms	
Potential Partners	
Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)	Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB)
Clann Credo	Rural Development Programme (LEADER)
Community Foundation Ireland (CFI)	Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Kildare
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Maynooth University
Department of Rural and Community Development	Rethink Ireland
Department of Social Protection	Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI)
Health Service Executive (HSE)	Social Entrepreneurs Ireland (SEI)
Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)	Social Value Ireland
Kildare County Council	Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland (SEAI)
Kildare Public Participation Network (PPN)	Youth Services i.e. Foroige and InSync



County Kildare

LEADER PARTNERSHIP



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Social Inclusion &
Community Activation
Programme



Coiste um Fhorbairt Pobail Áitiúil Chill Dara
Kildare Local Community Development
Committee

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Tá and Clár un Chuimsiú Sóisialta agus Gníomhachtú Pobail (SICAP) cómhaoinithe ag Rialtas na hÉireann, tríd an Rionn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail, agus ag an Aontas Eorpach trí Chiste Sóisialta na hEorpa Plus faoin gClár Fostaíochta, Cuimsiú, Scileanna agus Oilúna (t) 2021-2027.