

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2018-2022 (SICAP)

LDC Annual Progress Report 2021
LOT – Kildare County (6-1)



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The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

Purpose of the 2021 Annual Progress Report

The purpose of the 2021 Annual Progress Report is to capture the role that SICAP played in responding to the needs of SICAP target groups during the year. In doing so, this report will capture beneficiaries' needs in your Lot in 2021, the approaches used by the programme to respond to these needs, alongside challenges faced and lessons learned during the year.

Beneficiary type	Identified needs in 2021
Individuals	<p>The ongoing uncertainty around COVID 19 throughout 2021 meant that most of the engagement with individuals during the year was carried out remotely. The changing levels of restrictions also allowed some classroom-based activities to occur in the early autumn but most activity was carried out by phone, Zoom or email in the last twelve months.</p> <p>There was a very positive response from individuals to phone calls from SICAP staff at the start of the year and many individuals continued to engage regularly with an increase in the average number of interventions per client recorded.</p> <p>Individuals expressed a desire to participate in online courses and requested assistance with updating their CV. Anxiety and concerns about their mental health were mentioned by many individuals and a need was identified to build their self-confidence. The 1:1 engagement by phone or Zoom was welcomed and there was a noticeable uptake in online courses as a result of the interventions by phone to build a relationship with the individual.</p> <p>Many individuals were motivated to seek employment despite the pandemic and their needs related to industry standard courses offered by SICAP. Other individuals were interested in improving their skills but were not actively seeking employment for a variety of reasons including childcare and family responsibilities, transport, underlying medical conditions and lack of motivation. Needs that emerged during 2021 included lack of access to digital technology and language proficiency to participate fully in online courses. Some of the SICAP target groups were also difficult to engage online and this issue was heightened by the lack of face of face contact for most of the year.</p>

Local Community Groups	<p>SICAP staff contacted Local Community Groups and existing SICAP beneficiaries to identify needs and put in place supports. The needs were identified through contact with community groups, service providers and individuals with a good knowledge of the local area. This engagement took place primarily through phone conversations and outdoor social distancing meetings. Community groups appreciated and acknowledged the supports.</p> <p>The following needs were identified through this engagement process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people who were forced to cocoon and living alone were a concern for local communities. There was heightened concern for older people who have a disability or have mental health issues. • Food and medicine deliveries were identified as needed in some areas. • In isolated rural areas older vulnerable farmers were identified as requiring a check in on their welfare and to assist with farm tasks. • The limited access to community centres, community shops, resource centres, addiction centres and services, youth clubs and drop-in centres, libraries, sports facilities, and gyms deprived SICAP beneficiaries of social interaction and access to local services. • Concerns around mental health and wellbeing arose from an early stage in conversation with SICAP beneficiaries. • Many local community groups expressed their inability to engage and avail of online supports. The needs varied from lack of knowledge and access to technology – equipment and broadband/Wi-Fi- to an inability to use online platforms like MS Teams and Zoom. • As the pandemic continued during 2021 digital poverty became an increasing issue with concerns for older community members living in rural communities. • A lack of local rural transport has been identified as an issue in rural communities.
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Social Enterprises	<p>Fifteen social enterprises were assisted during 2021. Consultations were carried out on a one-to-one basis with each social enterprise to identify their training and mentoring needs and to discuss their future plans. The following were the key needs which were identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Enterprises are seeking mainly one-to-one supports at this time. There was a level of 'online fatigue' after 2020 and the first half of 2021 as there were many online group training sessions delivered during that time. Social Enterprises are now seeking one-to-one bespoke supports as they reopen and adapt to the changing circumstances and new challenges and opportunities. Networking opportunities for information and experience sharing have also been identified as a need. • Some of the needs identified include business planning and financial management, income diversification, digital innovation and online and digital marketing, health and safety training, governance training, GDPR training and HR management. • Adapting to changing circumstances and new opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the overwhelming need identified among Social Enterprises in County Kildare.
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<p>Children and families</p>	<p>During 2021 supports for children and families were adapted to address concerns raised by the impact of the pandemic. A need was identified through the School Completion Project clusters to address food poverty and to provide activities for children while schools were closed.</p> <p>Later during 2021 expressions of interest were sought and needs identified included a request to provide organised lunch time activities to improve discipline. Other issues which emerged during the pandemic included school refusal, increased levels of anxiety among young people as well as disengagement from school communities for some hard-to-reach young people.</p> <p>COVID 19 had a significant impact on SICAP work with children and families as a number of interventions did not take place due to public health restrictions.</p>
<p>Non-caseload individuals</p>	<p>Work with non-caseload individuals focuses mainly on individuals with a disability and outreach work in North West Kildare with rural dwellers including farmers living alone on small holdings. Other individuals engaged with included people with mental health concerns particularly in rural areas.</p> <p>The main issues included a lack of social interaction and difficulties in engaging remotely. The lack of transport was further heightened during the pandemic and remains the most significant barrier for individuals in isolated rural areas.</p>
<p>Networking</p>	<p>The main areas of networking during 2021 were the development of the Kildare Integration Strategy, the implementation of the County Kildare Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy, Kildare Social Inclusion Week and networking with community groups and social enterprises.</p> <p>The main need identified through networking with community groups and social enterprises was a request for SICAP to facilitate ongoing meetings for community groups to share information and maintain contact during COVID 19.</p> <p>Needs identified through the implementation of the Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy included concerns about children and families particularly the engagement of children while schools were closed.</p> <p>The Kildare Integration Strategy was completed and launched in October 2021 having been developed almost entirely through online engagement. Needs identified through this process again included the inability to access public services online, language difficulties and mental health issues particularly for people living in Direct Provision.</p>

How did SICAP respond to beneficiaries' needs in 2021?

Horizontal Principles

The Horizontal Principles of SICAP underpin all the work undertaken in the Programme in County Kildare. A community development approach is the basis on which the Programme operates on an outreach basis with local community groups and individuals living in disadvantaged areas across the county.

Most of the work undertaken by SICAP involves a collaborative approach either with other programmes managed by the Company or with other key stakeholders involving state agencies, community and voluntary service providers and local community groups. A specific horizontal approach in County Kildare for SICAP is a thematic approach around youth development which forms the basis for specific actions around leadership training and youth employment that are an important part of the delivery of SICAP.

How did you engage with SICAP target groups? Were there any barriers faced?

As the pandemic progressed during 2021 engagement by SICAP was predominantly carried out remotely. The strategy adopted at the beginning of the year was to re-engage with all individuals and groups that had been supported in 2020. This process was carried out remotely and almost entirely by phone initially. This check in approach was appreciated by the target groups as they had limited social contact and much of society was closed except for essential services. There was a higher response to phone calls than experienced in pre COVID19 times and once contact had been established many individuals and groups continued to engage thereafter as witnessed by the average number of interventions per community group and individual.

Given the public health restrictions new ways of engaging new individual clients and community groups were required and the use of social media played a significant role in 2021 in reaching out to individuals and groups that had not availed of the services of SICAP previously.

The launch of our new easy access website, and expansion of our social media presence helped significantly. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn were used to promote SICAP Courses, Workshops and Job Opportunities. Launches of the Integration and Blueway Strategy were conducted through webinar online. Information sessions were held over ZOOM, by SICAP Employment Support Workers on a One to One Basis.

Participation in online meetings, consultations, courses, and webinars improved as the year progressed although barriers were identified for some of the SICAP target groups. The engagement of Traveller and Roma online was difficult to achieve and issues with language proficiency and digital poverty occurred in reaching out to asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. This was further accentuated by overcrowding in accommodation and the lack of personal space to engage on a 1:1 basis in some cases Local community groups ceased operating to a larger extent, yet SICAP supports continued across a number of areas. Phone calls, online communications, local knowledge and socially distance meetings were carried out in meeting vulnerable community groups and individuals.

Engagement with community groups and social enterprises was carried out remotely and upskilling was required initially around the use of Zoom and MS Teams. All training including third level courses was delivered to community groups online but towards the end of the year there was a level of 'online fatigue' set in among groups as people grew tired of online workshops.

What types of supports did beneficiaries require during the year? What did these supports look like?

The types of supports required by beneficiaries during the year varied across the programme. County Kildare LEADER Partnership held meetings with community groups online to assess needs and to adapt the range of supports within the Company to meet local needs in North and South Kildare. The overwhelming reaction during 2021 was a request to maintain contact with the groups, provide them with an opportunity to network online through Zoom and to continue to identify funding programmes that would allow them to continue to survive until the pandemic subsided.

As a result of these meetings further networking sessions continued and groups were supported to avail of COVID 19 supports provided by the Government through Kildare County Council and Kildare LCDC. A series of workshops were also organised in October and November 2021 covering topics such as project & strategic planning, problem solving and building resilience. In November, there were three standalone workshops to cover best practice on Zoom, fundraising for community groups and running effective meetings online. These workshops were very well received. A total of 86 Local Community Groups were engaged in 2021 with an average number of almost eight interventions per group registered with SICAP.



Examples of flyers for courses

Fourteen social enterprises were supported to avail of a range of training workshops in the first six months of 2021. These included Financial Management, Business Planning, Online Marketing, Digital Marketing, Governance Training, and Health & Safety.

Following a successful joint application, funding was approved by the Irish Local Development Network, under the Dormant Accounts Fund, towards the Offaly/Kildare/Laois consortium for the delivery of the Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme in each county. The programme which commenced in Kildare in October 2021 will be delivered up to the end of April 2022 and includes the following elements: Strategic Planning and Income Diversification Training, Digital Innovation, Capacity Building, Health and Safety Training and Governance Support

SICAP funded a Kildare Social Enterprise Promotional video which highlights the work of County Kildare LEADER Partnership in the Social Enterprise arena and features four successful Kildare based social enterprises: The Old Hardware, Narraghmore, McAuley Place, Naas, Sensational Kids and Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park.



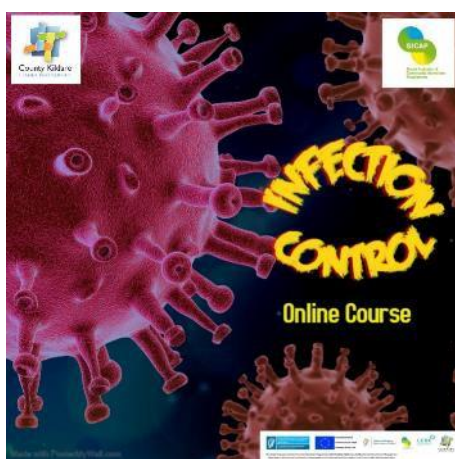
Images from the Social Enterprise Promotional Video

The launch of the Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme and the Kildare Social Enterprise Video took place online Kildare in October 2021 with volunteers and staff from a number of Kildare-based social enterprises in attendance for the first meeting of a new social enterprise network. Assistance was also provided to a number of Kildare-based Social Enterprises to apply for funding under the Small Capital Grants Programme 2021.

A total of 797 individuals were engaged on the SICAP caseload in 2021 with an average of almost six interventions per individual. The range of supports varied across Goal Two of the programme with a menu of options provided to encourage young people aged under 25 to engage. A fuller description of the supports provided by the Youth Employment Service is included later in this report.

Due to the ongoing restrictions and the lack of opportunities to provide classroom based and face to face engagement most supports were provided online or by phone. In addition to the registration of clients and assistance with the preparation of a personal action plan online supports also included CV preparation and job seeking skills, industry certified training courses, personal development programmes like the Six Dishes healthy food course as well as 1:1 support for clients who were interested in becoming self-employed.

The range of online courses included Manual Handling, Basic First Aid, Infection Control and Food Hygiene (HACCP) and 744 individual training licences were funded by SICAP for clients.



Samples of Courses available for Individuals

A QQI Level 4 Home Repair Care & Maintenance course had been planned, however, this couldn't happen under current Covid guidelines, therefore had to be postponed.

The benefits of online training include the opportunity to reach individuals across the county from areas which have poor transport links, provides the flexibility for individuals who have caring responsibilities and provide a quicker solution for those who require certification to take up employment in the short term. As described elsewhere in this report the challenges of digital poverty were overcome to an extent in 2021 by being able to provide devices on loan to course participants. This was well received and has worked well in the past year.

Supports for children and families are primarily offered through in school supports in collaboration with the School Completion clusters in the county. Schools were closed from January to March for students and therefore the activities planned for Breakfast and Homework Clubs were not possible. In some cases, School Completion Programme Co-ordinators used some of the funding to support other actions, such as resources to support study at home. When students returned to school in March and April 2021 some activities were organised for students where this was possible in line with Covid restrictions in the individual schools. Despite the long period of time that students were not physically in school, approximately 155 young people were supported on their return to school through food provision either at breakfast or lunch time.

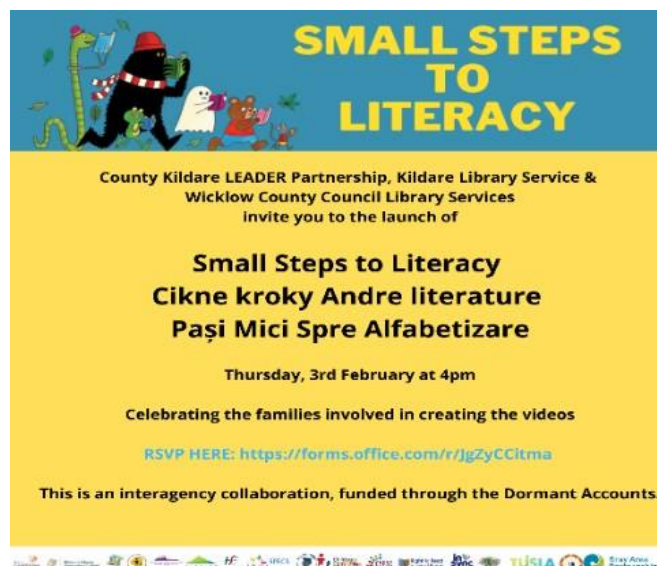
A total of 863 young people were engaged in activities during 2021 with new actions including Jump a Grade, the online tuition support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As part of the implementation of the Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy the Yellow Flag programme is continuing in St. Conleth's College, Newbridge and will be expanded to Maynooth Community College and St. Mary's Naas, in 2022.

An underspend on funding was redirected through an expression of interest process to interventions in two SCP Clusters. In St. Conleth's, Newbridge the funding was used to support a group of Traveller girls in second year to participate in a personal development programme facilitated by Insync. The Curragh/Kildare SCP Cluster used additional funding to support the purchase of video game equipment to engage a group of young boys who were getting into trouble because of their behaviour at lunchtime. This recreational activity resolved the behavioural problems and provided the project workers with an opportunity to engage the young men during their lunch break to identify support needs and other issues for the young people.

Infant Literacy videos which have been developed on a collaborative basis were finalised in 2021 and were shared with SICAP and Kildare & Wicklow Library services. This has been a significant piece of work and engaged Traveller and Roma communities in the creation of the resource, which has developed relationships and opportunities to support these communities.

The videos will be launched in early 2022. This interagency initiative is co-ordinated by SICAP and is named as an action in the current Kildare CYPSC three-year plan.

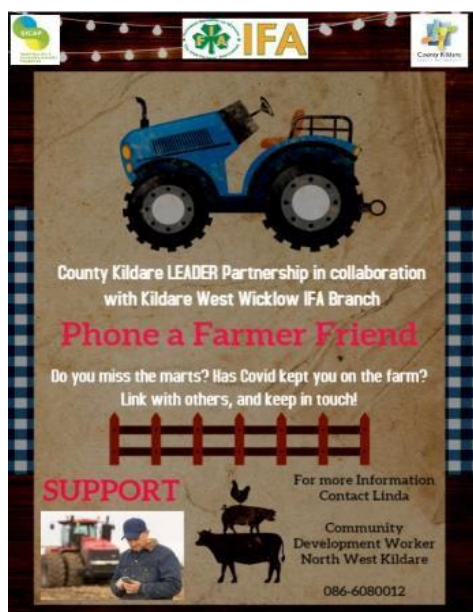


Did SICAP focus supports on groups that were disproportionately affected by COVID-19?

Over the last two years concerns have arisen about the impact of COVID 19 on some groups in County Kildare. Some of these concerns are addressed later in this report in relation to priority groups identified in the SICAP Mid Programme Review.

In addition to the priority groups identified nationally issues around rural isolation and mental health and personal wellbeing have been highlighted in County Kildare. As part of the Community Response Forum in County Kildare SICAP provided online supports and workshops for community groups and individuals, supported the delivery of food, medical and fuel supplies. CKLP also developed a series of mindfulness support messages which were made available through social media platforms.

In North West Kildare through SICAP outreach community development work a need arose to address social isolation within the farming community during the pandemic. As a response a collaboration was developed between SICAP and the Irish Farmers Association and with the support of Macra na Feirme, a befriending phone service was developed. As a result, ten farmers received a weekly check in call from farming volunteers within the community. The experience gained from this collaborative engagement has identified a need to consider ongoing supports for smallholders again in County Kildare.



Phone a Farmer Friend, and Befriending Volunteer Flyer, 2021

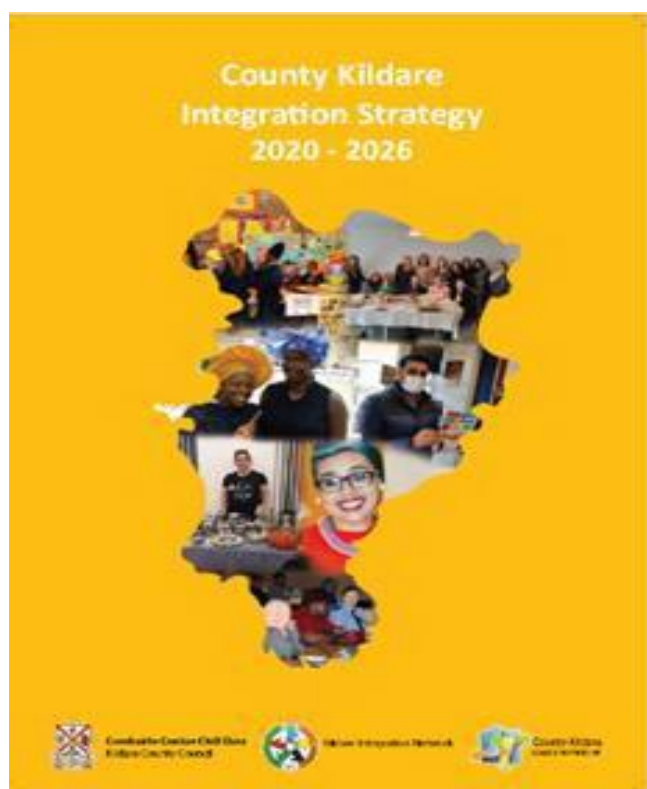
One of the actions also impacted by COVID 19 has been the development of social farming in the county. With the assistance of funding under Healthy Ireland people with disabilities gained the opportunity to engage in farm tasks and with farm families. Despite the impact of COVID 19 the social farming placements went ahead and it is planned that SICAP will support the expansion of social farming opportunities in 2022 across the county.

Did SICAP participate in collaborations or joint initiatives with local partners to address the needs of SICAP target groups? What were the objectives of these collaborations?

SICAP continued to collaborate with local partners in 2021 to address the needs of the target groups. The implementation of the County Kildare Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy was facilitated through an implementation group that has engagement from all the key state agencies, service providers and voluntary organisations. A collaborative approach was taken to support an application by Kildare Traveller Action CLG for Community Development Project funding to DRCD. The requirement for a strong Traveller community development organisation was a key element of the Traveller Roma Strategy. Unfortunately, the application to DRCD was unsuccessful and SICAP has subsequently funded a capacity building initiative with the Board of Kildare Traveller Action CLG with a view to strengthening its capacity to seek core funding at the next available opportunity.

SICAP continued to co fund with Kildare County Council the post of Inclusion Strategies Coordinator and a Traveller Community Development Worker. During 2021 much of the work around implementation of the Strategy continued to focus on COVID 19 supports to the Traveller and Roma communities including the homeless and children and families.

The most significant event of the past year was the launch of the Kildare Integration Strategy 2020 - 2026 in October 2021 by Roderic O'Gorman T.D., Minister for Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The strategy led by Kildare County Council and co funded by SICAP and Kildare County Council is the second county strategy and was developed during COVID 19 in 2020 and 2021. As the consultative process was a participatory approach there were challenges during the pandemic in ensuring that there was a real sense of involvement by people from ethnic minority and new community backgrounds. This was achieved by a survey of community members which was translated into ten languages: Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak, Romanian, French, Portuguese, Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, and Arabic. A total of 110 individuals completed the survey of thirty-six different nationalities with 70% of this completing the survey being women.



A separate survey was conducted with service providers with a response from fifty-three service providers across a wide range covering health, education, employment supports, policing, volunteering, and community development. The surveys were hosted on the websites of Kildare County Council and County Kildare LEADER Partnership during the consultative process. Eleven focus groups took place online including specific focus groups with women, Direct Provision residents, students and Comhairle na NOg members. A total of eleven people attended the focus groups online.



Traveller Inclusion through Sport Programme, 2021

Since the launch of the Integration Strategy an Implementation Steering Group has been established to oversee the implementation of the strategy and includes representation from key state agencies, service providers and community /voluntary organisations. The implementation of the strategy is supported by the SICAP Inclusion Strategies Coordinator and a number of key actions in the Integration Strategy will be led by SICAP.

There are a number of other significant collaborations that took place during 2021. The sixth annual Kildare Social Inclusion Week was held from 24th September 2021 to 2nd October 2021 as a collaboration between Kildare Public Participation Network (PPN) and SICAP. All the events took place online and the range of events in 2021 included information sessions, seminars, webinars, the launch of a research report by Older Voices Kildare and the launch of the Kildare Integration Strategy. The closing event was hosted by Newbridge Family Resource Centre and was held outdoors in their new sensory garden.

In North West Kildare an initiative led by SICAP has focused on the needs of individuals and communities in this rural area which has depended on peat extraction for fuel and employment up to now. SICAP reconvened an inter-agency group in 2021 which had originally met just before COVID 19. The group which included DSP, Local Link and local community groups and social enterprises clearly identified transport as the most significant issue affecting individuals and groups.

As a result of the collaborative engagement a number of developments have occurred. Local submissions have been made to the National Transport Authority as part of the Connecting Ireland consultative process. These have included submissions for a service from Allenwood to Athy serving Lullymore, Rathangan and Monasterevin. Local Link has also engaged with the National Transport Authority to develop a new service which will link communities in North West Kildare to Naas via Sallins Train Station. A local community survey has also been conducted in the Johnstownbridge area led by the local BREDA group and supported by SICAP. Arising from the promotion of this survey there have been service improvements locally facilitated by Local Link and the NTA.

Please briefly describe the cross-programme, integrated approach that SICAP utilised during 2021 to respond to the needs of SICAP target groups:

SICAP continued to work closely with other programmes managed by County Kildare LEADER Partnership during 2021 to provide a companywide response to the pandemic and worked with other agencies in County Kildare around specific thematic issues including food poverty, digital poverty, and support for older people. Coordination staff within the Company met weekly to oversee the implementation of the CKLP business continuity plan and to discuss the implications of public health advice and restrictions for the delivery of services to individuals and communities.

Within County Kildare LEADER Partnership SICAP worked with all other programmes which include the Asylum and Migrant Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Roma Employment Programme, (both funded by Department of Justice), Older Voices Kildare (HSE), TUS and RSS schemes (DSP), Social Enterprise Training and Mentoring (DRCD/Dormant Accounts) and Heads Up Programme (HSE). SICAP also collaborated with hosted projects in the company including Kildare Sports Partnership, Kildare PPN and Healthy Ireland.

Networking meetings with local community groups were organised on a company wide basis involving staff from various programmes that engage with local community groups. These online meetings also provided an opportunity to clarify the Company's business continuity plan especially where community groups are dependent on TUS/RSS and CE to support local community services. Arising from these community meetings a series of online thematic workshops were organised to support groups to prepare to adapt to a post COVID 19 environment.

SICAP collaborated with Heads Up Kildare to support the delivery of "Moving on Kildare," a rural intervention aimed at supporting men aged over eighteen with their mental health and personal wellbeing. SICAP assisted with the organisation of workshops in Allenwood and referred individuals engaged through outreach community development work in the North West Kildare area.



SICAP collaborated with Older Voice Kildare and assisted with their Befriending phone service and the collection and delivery of food, medical and fuel supplies. SICAP provided funding for food hampers in December 2021 which were provided for vulnerable older people identified by Older Voices Kildare and social services. SICAP also collaborated with the South Kildare Small Jobs Service which commenced operation during 2021. This service run through the Enterprise Skills CE Scheme, funded by DSP, provides a service for older people, and carries out small household jobs. SICAP supports included access to social enterprise training and mentoring as well as assistance with fundraising.

SICAP collaborated with TÚS and RSS to provide training for participants including manual handling and CV preparation and TUS also assisted with the delivery of food parcels and donations of food by local retailers to food banks.

SICAP collaborated with Kildare Sports Partnership, Healthy Ireland, and Kildare Traveller Action CLG and organised a six-week Inclusion Through Sports Programme open to member of Kildare's ethnic minority communities including the Traveller community.

Engaging new communities was also supported through a number of cross-programme initiatives including a Migrant Women's Civic Engagement Programme in collaboration with Kildare County Council and CKLP's Integration Programme, facilitated by AkiDWA.

SICAP CKLP cross programme collaboration with Kildare Roma Employment & Roma Health Programmes supported the engagement of the Roma community in 2021.

What type of work did LCGs and SEs on the 2021 caseload undertake in the community in response to the needs of SICAP target groups?

During the pandemic many groups have been unable to meet due to public health restrictions and lack of premises. Others have adapted their facilities and organised outdoor gatherings. Na Fianna Men's Shed is based in Allenwood, Co. Kildare and has its own Shed and twenty-two active members. The group has availed of SICAP support through outreach community development work in the North West Kildare area and are one of a number of groups who actively participate in networking and training organised in the county.

The group had received a donation of a vintage tractor a couple of years ago, but the tractor was required significant work. During COVID 19 the group decided to rebuild the tractor almost from scratch. This project was started and completed during 2021 with the members of the Men's Shed sourcing parts and undertaking the restoration project. Once completed and as the group already had their own tractor, they decided with the consent of the previous owner to raffle the tractor and donate the nett proceeds after restoration costs to their local Saint Vincent De Paul branch. The raffle was a wonderful success, and the group was able to present a cheque for E4250 to SVP.

According to Johnny O'Callaghan, Chairman of Na Fianna Men's Shed it was a great community project, "We were so pleased to have played such a vital role in this project, and our members with their various skill sets did a wonderful job".



L to R Na Fianna Men's Shed, Nerilie Duffey, PRO Narraghmore Development Association, the restored tractor in Allenwood

Social enterprises have played an important role during COVID 19 in providing local services like community shops and cafes as well as outdoor social and recreation. The Old Hardware in Narraghmore is a social enterprise developed by Narraghmore Development Association. The project includes a community shop and a community tearoom which reopened at the end of April 2021 when COVID 19 restrictions were relaxed. The community shop was opened in 2019 in response to the closure of the local post office and with the support of the volunteers who run the shop and community café as well as the support of the local community this social enterprise has thrived. Apart from providing an opportunity to sample homemade baked goods, cakes, biscuits, and artisan coffee when picking up essential items the shop has become a hub for local craftspeople to sell their products locally. Since reopening in April 2021, the community café has been extremely busy and has provided a social outlet for local people as well as a stopover for visitors including groups of cyclists who travel through the area.

SICAP support for social enterprises has included 1:1 staff support and access to training and mentoring sourced from DRCD as well as assistance with funding applications for capital grants. The training and mentoring needs identified have included business planning and financial management, income diversification, digital innovation and online and digital marketing, health and safety training, governance training, GDPR training and HR management. A total of fifteen social enterprises were supported in 2021.

SICAP produced a video “- Case Study of SICAP supports for Social Enterprises in County Kildare” – which was launched in October 2021. The video features four social enterprises including the Old Hardware in Narraghmore.

[Please provide a brief update on your ways of working in 2021.](#)

SICAP staff have continued to work remotely during 2021 in line with the guidance provided by Government. Staff have been provided with the equipment and supports to work effectively from home.

SICAP staff meetings have been held monthly via Zoom and SICAP Team Leaders engage on a weekly basis as part of the Coordination Staff group which monitors implementation of the company business continuity plan. While outreach community development work was impacted by a lack of face-to-face contact with community groups, food and medicine deliveries continued throughout COVID 19 in some areas as well as supporting older farmers in isolated rural areas. Staff have provided continued supports to groups through zoom meetings, WhatsApp groups, email, texts, and phone calls.

With COVID 19 restrictions in place, three Level 7 courses (Community Development & Leadership, Youth Work Studies and Equality Studies) were completed online for the remainder of the academic year and a new Youth Studies Course commenced in September 2021 on an online basis also. The SICAP Level 7 course coordinator built a relationship with the groups by joining the online classes for quick check-ins, and holding group check-ins on Zoom, outside of class time. Contact was also maintained on an ongoing basis via group emails, as well as individual emails and text messages.

Where public health restrictions have allowed classroom-based activity some courses have taken place in person. These have included Safe Pass although there are stricter SOLAS guidelines i.e., smaller numbers, maintaining social distancing and providing a recent Covid Commencement Training certificate. Using the CKLP training rooms restricted the numbers further (due to space), and an attempt to use a local hotel also proved difficult as many of the participants did not have Covid certificates required for the hospitality sector. Under the current Solas guidelines it has proved to be more effective to use local community halls which has facilitated courses in Athy and in Johnstownbridge as part of the outreach strategy in both areas. Some planned courses like the QQI Level 4, Home Repair Care & Maintenance course were postponed due to the restrictions and will be offered again in 2022. Face to face engagement took place with self-employment clients where public health restrictions permitted but in the main this work was carried out through Zoom meetings throughout the year.

Please outline the challenges faced and lessons learned during 2021. Were you able to overcome any of the challenges?

The delivery of SICAP has faced a number of challenges during the last twelve months. Given the experience of 2020 when Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) had to be reviewed, and the uncertainty that has prevailed throughout 2021 around the impact of the pandemic on public health, it has been difficult to implement the programme and to maintain a focus on the most disadvantaged.

With the assistance of social media and the connection of SICAP staff with local communities, individuals and groups have availed of SICAP services which has resulted in KPI targets being exceeded again in 2021.

Despite the difficulties in engaging with disadvantaged communities almost 24% of individuals on the SICAP caseload were from disadvantaged areas. Compared to 2020 where 20% of individuals engaged with lived in disadvantaged areas this is a notable achievement and is close to pre pandemic results for the programme.

The success in achieving targets in 2021 has been based somewhat on the lessons learned in 2020 about how to deal with an inability to engage in face-to-face contact and the importance of re engaging with individuals and community groups at the start of each year. This process was undertaken in January 2021 and developed relationships with individuals and groups, firstly by revisiting personal action plans and community group plans and identifying progression options that met the individual or group needs.

In moving to online delivery of supports in 2020 a challenge identified was the inability of some individuals and groups to avail of supports due to digital poverty. By 2021 this was overcome by offering the loan of tablets for many of the online courses offered under Goal 2. This was notable with young people availing of support from the SICAP Youth Employment Service where demand sometimes outstripped supply.

A further aspect of digital poverty became apparent in the delivery of third level courses where some students on the Level 7 courses needed access to a laptop to complete course work and assignments. This challenge has been overcome for courses for the 2021 / 2022 academic year although the learning is that provision needs to be made in future years for access to digital equipment for participants on any online courses offered by SICAP. With the collaboration of other programmes managed by the Company it is hoped that there will be access in future to an adequate supply of tablets and laptops. While outreach work has been difficult to engage in during 2021 new strategies have been developed to reach residents in disadvantaged areas. These have included collaboration with Community Workers in Kildare County Council to organise outdoor information sessions in local authority estates and the organisation of healthy food initiatives.

An online healthy food project called Six Dishes was developed to engage with individuals in the most disadvantaged areas. Two courses were delivered during 2021 and the main focus was to target people in disadvantaged areas experiencing food poverty and to stimulate activity and socialisation. Due to public health restrictions both courses were delivered via Zoom. Over half of the participants had no previous experience of the Zoom platform and required assistance initially to use it. The course involved the development of a recipe booklet based on Safefood Ireland's website. Each of the six recipes had a corresponding video which was shown to the group each week and fresh food packs were delivered to participants each week. The impact of the healthy food project is that it has established engagement in the most disadvantaged areas which can be further developed in 2022.

Despite the achievements noted in this report there are challenges that have been identified which will require a concerted inter agency approach to tackling post COVID 19. These challenges are in relation to target groups that have been disproportionately affected by COVID 19 and have been recognised nationally in the Mid Programme Review. The agreed priorities for SICAP in 2022 and 2023 will focus on Traveller /

Roma, New Communities, Older People, Long Term Unemployed and Mental Health (including young people). This mirrors the challenges faced by SICAP in County Kildare where the lack of face-to-face engagement has impacted most significantly on engagement with Travellers, Roma, and New Communities despite a high level of cooperation among agencies and service providers.

This cooperation and collaboration have been nurtured through the development of the Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy and the new Kildare Integration Strategy and supported with significant financial investment by SICAP and Kildare County Council in particular. These supports will be increased further in 2022 to strengthen the engagement of Travellers, Roma, and New Communities in employment as well as further community development supports to promote the engagement of these target groups in decision making processes.

Please describe an approach or project that worked well in 2021 that you think would be useful to share with other SICAP implementers.



Flyers for YEP 1 and YEP2, modules vary on each programme

The SICAP Youth Employment Service engaged with 218 young people through 1:1 and Zoom sessions in 2021. In terms of progression 92 young people moved on to employment and 25 progressed to further education.

The approach adopted by the Youth Employment Service during COVID 19 has been to organise a Youth Employment Programme based on two 40-minute Zoom sessions two days per week over an eight-week period. Soft skills offered included self-confidence, self-esteem, communications, and teamwork along with driver theory. The sessions also included four forty-minute sessions of work preparation, cover letters, C.V.'s and interview techniques. Four Youth Employment Programmes were offered during 2021 and each programme included a specific topic of interest. These included Mobile Phone Photography, Herb and Salad Growing (packs of seeds etc delivered to 24 young people), Health and Fitness (in collaboration with Kildare Sports Partnership), Cookery (delivery of ingredients to 27 young people on weekly basis for 6 weeks) and Environmental Awareness.

The Health and Fitness YEP in July/August 2021 included two outings, a walk through the Curragh with a game of Pitch and Putt and secondly an outing to Abbeyfield Adventure Centre. Twelve young people engaged in each of the activities and transport was provided for both trips. The trips were organised when COVID 19 restrictions permitted. For the Environmental Awareness topic 100 saplings were sourced from Coillte for planting in Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park. This was postponed due to safety concerns in December 2021 and will be rescheduled in 2022.

A Barista one day training course was organised along with KWETB for fourteen young unemployed and a further fourteen participants successfully completed Safe Pass training. A Resilience Through Art course is currently running for 6 young people with specific needs in Leixlip, funded by KWETB Community Education Service who have also agreed to fund another course in 2022 for six young people in the south of the county.

SICAP conducted a targeted promotion of the Youth Employment Programme with the Traveller community in 2021 and there are currently seven young people that have identified as Travellers although there a number also who have not identified. SICAP Youth Employment Services also conducted a targeted promotion in the Direct Provision Centres in Newbridge and Monasterevin in 2021. To date twelve individuals have engaged with the service. Outreach work has also been undertaken at Community Roadshows in disadvantaged estates in Bishopsland Kildare Town, Clonmullion Athy and Moate View Kilmead.

The Youth Employment Service has thirteen devices (tablets) available to loan to young people for use on Zoom and/or to complete online courses, all of which were allocated during the year.

[Please reflect on the programme supports that DRCD and/or Pobal provided to LDCs in 2021. Were they helpful? Would you recommend any changes in approach or content?](#)

The supports provided by DRCD and Pobal during 2021 were appropriate and helpful especially given the different levels of restrictions that applied over the last twelve months.

The flexibility around programme delivery by DRCD has facilitated the development of online engagement and the relaxation of programme requirements has allowed relationships with individuals and local community groups to develop. This is evident in the increase in the number of interventions across Goal One and Goal Two. It is hoped that the lessons from this experience will be learned and that efficiencies that have been identified will be maintained for the remainder of the programme. These have included the relaxation on data consent in hard copy and retention of registration forms in hard copy, facility to provide training online and through the use of licences to provide online courses, use of Zoom and Teams for programme delivery and the flexibility in relation to the use of budgets to meet local needs during COVID 19 by agreement with Kildare LCDC.

The annual engagement meeting with Pobal is very important for SICAP in Kildare as it provides a national context to the work that the programme is undertaking. The data reports from Pobal are very useful and play an important part in identifying priorities for the annual planning process. This has been the case in 2021 when the lack of engagement of Travellers in employment was compared with a satisfactory engagement in further education and training. This enabled SICAP to prioritise supports for Traveller employment in 2021 and to successfully source additional CE positions specifically for Travellers. A Traveller Community Development Worker has now been engaged to actively encourage take up of these CE places in 2022 and to encourage community and voluntary groups to act as sub sponsors for the placements.

Please suggest potential programme supports that DRCD and/or Pobal could deliver to LDCs in 2022.

In developing the Statement of Priorities for SICAP 2022 / 2023 a number of programmes supports were identified in collaboration with Kildare LCDC and have been included in the agreed Statement of Priorities.

1. Showcase SICAP learning from Traveller Roma engagement with link back to NTRIS implementation
2. Showcase SICAP learning from engagement with New Communities and the development of local integration strategies.
3. Host a national event online on referral pathways for the long-term unemployed highlighting good practice of referral networks in operation at county / city level.
4. Carry out research to review the HP Deprivation Index taking account the impact of HAP numbers on the deprivation indices.
5. Provide programme supports for LDC's and LCDC's engaging in work with ex-offenders
6. Map SICAP initiatives for young people at risk of early school leaving to support the expansion of DEIS resources for schools in disadvantaged areas across the county.