

Review of SICAP 2018-2023

Final Report

2024

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ACRONYMS

AIEB	All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
BTWEA	Back to Work Enterprise Allowance
CE	Community Employment
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CES	Community Employment Scheme
CEUD	The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CWI	Community Work Ireland
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science funds
DI	Deprivation Index
DOH	Department of Health
DOJ	Department of Justice
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
DSP	Department of Social Protection
DTT	Distance Travelled Tool
EC	European Commission
EIST	Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Boards
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
FRC	Family Resource Centre
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point

HAP	Housing Assistance Payments
HR	Human Resource
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
ILDN	Irish Local Development Network
INOUE	Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
IPO	International Protection Office
IRIS	Integrated Reporting and Information System
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LA	Local Authority
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LCG	Local Community Group
LDC	Local Development Company
LDCS	Local Community Development Committees
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
LGBTI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and More
MAOU	Monitoring, Analysis, and Outcomes Unit
MNE	Multinational Enterprise
NA	Not Applicable
NAPAR	National Action Plan Against Racism
NDA	National Disability Authority
NDIS	National Disability Inclusion Strategy
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NFQ	Irish National Framework of Qualifications
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSP	National Service Plan
NTRIS	National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
NWCI	National Women's Council of Ireland
PDF	Portable Document Format
PEIL	Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning
PI	Programme Implementers
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PPN	Public Participation Network
PSD	Public Sector Duty
RSS	Rural Social Scheme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SE	Social Enterprise

SERI	Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland
SlandEC	Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
SWOC	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges
TD	Teachta Dála
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child
UX	User Experience

1 Introduction

1.1 Programme Overview

The following sub-sections present an overview of the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) lots, funding mechanisms, goals, target groups, horizontal themes, beneficiaries, and stakeholders. The purpose of these sub-sections is to provide context for the remainder of the report. However, it should be noted that these aspects of the programme are discussed in greater detail in Section 3.2.

1.1.1 SICAP Lots and Funding

SICAP is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), initially under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014 – 2020. PEIL has been succeeded by Employment, Inclusion, Skills, and Training (EIST) programme, under ESF+. The 2018-2022¹ programme had a total budget of €196,590,396. The total cost reported was €194,497,228, which represented 99% of the budget. The budget is made up of both action and administration costs.

While the existing SICAP Programme was originally envisaged to span the period 2018-2022, it should be noted that a 12-month extension was granted and the Programme will now end in December 2023. The new Programme will be rolled out from January 2024.

The programme is managed at a local level by 33 Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), with support from local authorities (LAs), and delivered nationally by 46² Local Development Companies (LDCs) as Programme Implementers (PIs) across 51 catchment areas (Lots) across the country.

SICAP is delivered locally by Programme Implementers (PIs), who are empowered to engage with marginalised communities and service providers

¹ Please note that, although the programme ran to the end of 2023, the figures provided are until the end of 2022, as figures for 2023 were not available at the time of writing.

² Out of the 49 Local Development Companies currently operating across Ireland, 46 deliver SICAP.

using a flexible community development approach to address issues relating to social exclusion and inequality. The task of PIs is to reflect the broad scope of the programme in their actions and to use programme funding to strengthen communities and improve the lives of individuals. Bottom-up approaches are enabled within the framework of a national programme that provides targets, performance indicators and requirements. This configuration provides the benefit of having a national policy framework structure but with the flexibility of a more local approach.

1.1.2 SICAP Goals

SICAP 2018-2023 had two goals, as follows:

Goal 1: Supporting Communities

To support communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues, developing the capacity of Local Community Groups (LCGs), and creating more sustainable communities.

Goal 2: Supporting Individuals

To support disadvantaged individuals to improve the quality of their lives through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market supports.

1.1.3 SICAP Target Groups

Disadvantage is experienced more strongly by particular groups of people in society and in particular geographic communities. SICAP takes a dual approach to targeting disadvantage and social exclusion by allowing PIs the flexibility to target individuals and communities by taking an area-based or issue-based approach.

SICAP supports a range of groups in society that are disadvantaged and marginalised and unable or unlikely to access mainstream supports. Pre-defined target groups have been set for SICAP based on the current socio-economic context, the level of need in society, as well as government priorities. The 13 target groups supported under SICAP 2018-2023 are listed in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 SICAP 2018-2023 Target Groups

Disadvantaged Children and Families	People Living in Disadvantaged Communities
Disadvantaged Young People (aged 15-24)	People with Disabilities
Disadvantaged Women	Roma
Emerging Needs Group	Travellers
Lone Parents	The Disengaged from the Labour Market (Economically Inactive)
Low Income Workers/ Households	The Unemployed
New Communities	

SICAP is aimed at those who need more help in society and who are on the margins of daily life. For SICAP to be an effective social inclusion and community development programme, it is critical that resources, supports and interventions are targeted and do not become universal supports for the general population to prevent the dilution of the interventions' effectiveness and the increase in the duplication of supports and services.

While PIs are not required to provide services to all target groups, a well-evidenced need for a SICAP target group in the locality should be reflected in the annual plan. Each of the SICAP target groups are explained separately in the SICAP 2018-2023 Programme Requirements.³

1.1.4 Horizontal Themes

SICAP is underpinned by three horizontal themes that act as the core principles cutting across all areas of PIs' work.

1. Promoting an equality framework with a particular focus on gender equality and anti-discrimination practices.

³ SICAP 2018-2023 Programme Requirements, Section 3. Available from: [SICAP-Programme-Requirements-2018-2022-V1-1.pdf](https://www.pobal.ie/SICAP-Programme-Requirements-2018-2022-V1-1.pdf) (pobal.ie).

In delivering SICAP, Programme Implementers seek to ensure that individuals (or groups of individuals) are treated fairly and equally, specific to their needs. Under the Equal Status Act, it is illegal to discriminate on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community.

SICAP seeks to promote an equality framework with a particular focus on gender equality and anti-discriminatory practices. PIs must ensure that equality work is carried out with LCGs and individuals, as well as making sure that it is reflected in their own internal practices. To achieve gender equality, the different needs of people of all genders must be recognised. Some women may experience double or cumulative disadvantage due to their belonging to multiple target groups. Increased engagement with women and others facing discrimination will support the cross-cutting equality horizontal theme to promote an equality framework. PIs must reflect on their human resource processes to tackle unconscious bias and to create a workplace where people of all genders and members of groups facing discrimination can advance into leadership positions.

2. Applying community development approaches to achieve the participation of disadvantaged and marginalised communities in the wider local development context.

Actions across both goals must be underpinned by community development approaches and principles. Community development is defined as:

“a developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and coordinated way.”⁴

A community development approach ensures that the capacity of communities and target groups is developed so that they will have the opportunity to input and determine the core needs in their communities, as well as actions to respond to these needs. A community development approach also increases the

⁴ All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training (2016), “All Ireland Standards for Community Work”, page 5.

participation of those who are the most marginalised by engaging people through pre-development mechanisms such as outreach work. PIs must ensure that their own governance and decision-making structures are reflective of community development principles and that SICAP target groups are participating in decisions that determine the work of SICAP locally.

3. Developing collaborative approaches with stakeholders to improve how mainstream policies and programmes are delivered so that they impact more positively on the socially excluded.

PIs must develop a collaborative approach in their delivery of SICAP to increase the sustainability of the work and grow the potential to mainstream initiatives piloted through the Programme. SICAP focuses on the synergies to be achieved with other national, regional, and local strategies and plans for social inclusion, activation, and community development. It is critical that PIs collaborate with other service providers to ensure ongoing progression for those most marginalised and that LCDCs play their part in enabling and supporting this. Collaborative approaches can reduce overlap and duplication in service provision and thus ensure greater value for money for the Exchequer, and over the longer term can reduce dependency on SICAP funding.

PIs and LCDCs understand the needs of the target groups and local communities. This is vital in determining the types of interventions and actions that are needed from SICAP to improve people's lives and strengthen communities. Diverse challenges face local communities across Ireland and SICAP needs to be able to respond accordingly. SICAP offers PIs and LCDCs the flexibility to jointly target supports to particular groups and to respond to issues that have emerged in their delivery areas. SICAP is a national programme that can be tailored locally to best meet the needs of disadvantaged areas and target groups on the ground. However, it is important to stress that the programme is unable to, and is not expected to, provide a response to all the issues and barriers faced by individuals living in our communities.

PIs must incorporate the horizontal principles into their SICAP strategic and annual planning processes and in how they engage with individuals and LCGs and other stakeholders.

1.1.5 Programme Beneficiaries

The six types of SICAP beneficiaries are listed in Table 1.2 and briefly outlined below. The eligibility criteria and registration process are detailed in SICAP 2018-2023 Programme Requirements⁵. All SICAP beneficiaries must meet the criteria set out in the Programme Requirements to avail of SICAP supports.

Table 1.2: SICAP 2018-2023 Programme Beneficiaries

Local Community Groups	Children and Families
Social Enterprises	Non-Caseload Individuals
Individual Beneficiaries	PI Collaborations

Beneficiary Type 1: Local Community Groups

Local Community Groups can be voluntary groups that work in communities for the public benefit. They might participate in local and regional networks or be a local support group which represents a target group. LCGs supported through SICAP can be focused on addressing the needs of specific target group(s) and/or the needs of specific geographic areas. They do not need to be a legal entity but should have agreed aims and objectives or be a structure with rules (i.e., be an organised group) and may, for example, be an unincorporated association. The groups must be self-governing and not-for-profit enterprises and may rely on the support of volunteers to carry out their activities.

Beneficiary Type 2: Social Enterprises

⁵ SICAP 2018-2023 Programme Requirements, Section 3. Available from: [SICAP-Programme-Requirements-2018-2022-V1-1.pdf \(pobal.ie\)](#).

Social enterprises (SEs) supported under SICAP must provide services to SICAP target groups/ disadvantaged communities or employ/provide training to SICAP target groups. A social enterprise is an enterprise⁶:

- That trades for a social/societal purpose;
- Where at least part of its income is earned from its trading activity;
- Is separate from government; and
- Where the surplus is primarily re-invested in the social objective.

Programme Implementers may work with SEs to increase their capacity and assist them in linking with SICAP target groups through services or by providing training, volunteering, and employment opportunities. The types of activities that could be undertaken with SEs include providing training or supports to:

- Increase the level and/or type of services delivered to SICAP target groups;
- Increase the sustainability of the enterprise and their ability to contribute to the social and economic development of disadvantaged areas; and
- Develop or explore developing new social enterprises.

Beneficiary Type 3: Individual Beneficiaries

Individual beneficiaries are people who are registered with SICAP on an one-to-one basis and in receipt of Goal 2 interventions. There are a number of ways for an individual to come into contact with SICAP and to be registered. Individuals can approach a PI directly, a PI may approach an individual through outreach work, or the person could be referred to a PI by another agency or organisation.

Beneficiary Type 4: Children and Families

The 'children and families' beneficiary type includes children and young people (under 18 years of age) who belong to a SICAP target group and who are engaged with SICAP through their school and/or local activities. They can be

⁶ Forfas (2013), Social Enterprise in Ireland: Sectoral Opportunities and Policy Issues, p. 10. Available from: www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/1970/01/forfas_social_enterprise_in_ireland_sectoral_opportunities_and_policy_issues_publication-3.pdf.

supported either on their own (as a one-to-one or in a group setting) or as part of a family intervention involving their parents or guardians. Work with children or young people and their families is focused on Goal 2 interventions, which include preventative work in tackling early school leaving, as well as homework support and breakfast clubs.

Beneficiary Type 5: Non-Caseload Individuals

Non-caseload individuals are beneficiaries who participate in specific Goal 1 community engagement activities or Goal 2 information events, such as attending a lifelong learning information event or a jobs fair. Non-caseload events should be targeted at SICAP target groups but not all attendees need to belong to a target group.

Beneficiary Type 6: PI Collaborations

PI collaborations are structures that the PI engages with to address social inclusion and disadvantage. This could include work with other entities such as local employers or agencies. It replaces structures and networks under the previous programme. Work carried out with PI collaborations should be linked to SICAP outcomes to address gaps in services, improve the quality of services, and identify new approaches to address barriers to access or participation by SICAP target groups as set out in the monitoring framework.

1.1.6 Key Stakeholders

Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)

The Department of Rural and Community Development is the lead and funding department for SICAP. The Department channels SICAP funding directly to LCDCs.

Local authorities and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are the contracting authorities that manage and administer SICAP at a local level and direct funding to the Programme Implementers. LCDCs are the key decision-makers at local level and have responsibility for monitoring compliance in respect of financial management and performance monitoring. They also have responsibility for decision-making regarding the annual performance review and the annual planning process for the delivery of SICAP in their area.

Local Development Companies (LDCs)

Local Development Companies (LDCs) are multi-sectoral partnerships that deliver community and rural development initiatives, labour market activation, social inclusion, climate action and social enterprise services. They are not-for-profit, volunteer-led organisations who provide integrated services so that employment supports, enterprise grants, social inclusion, training, well-being, and environmental supports are available under one roof. LDCs are the implementers of the current programme and their representative organisation is the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN).

Programme Implementers (PIs)

The Programme Implementers design and, once approved by the LCDC, implement the annual plan in their area, reporting directly to the relevant LCDC on actions, targets and spending. The contract between an LCDC and Programme Implementer sets out the contractual conditions in full.

Representative organisations

National level organisations representing SICAP target groups include The Wheel, the Irish Travellers Movement, Pavee Point, Disability Federation of Ireland, Community Work Ireland, National Youth Council of Ireland, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, the New Communities Partnership and the Irish Refugee Council.

Pobal

Pobal supports the Department of Rural and Community Development in the design, procurement, management, roll-out, monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

The ESRI has been contracted to carry out a series of project level evaluations of SICAP, continuing with work carried out on the 2015–2017 programme. The research programme is overseen by a steering group and a consultative stakeholder panel also provides an input into the direction of the research programme. The ESRI continues to support the programme by advising on general programme and statistical matters.

1.2 Scope and Methodology

KPMG’s review of the current iteration of SICAP includes a review of existing SICAP evidence, as well as primary data collection with a wide range of programme stakeholders.

As part of the secondary sources examination, which is presented in Chapter 3, the following documentation has been reviewed:

- SICAP 2018-2023 Programme Requirements;
- Annual progress reports (2018 – 2021);
- SICAP Monitoring Framework and Data;
- Case studies prepared by LDCs (2018 – 2020);
- Previous research, internal and external;
- Relevant policy context, accounting for wider international context (including EU level, considering new policy directions under ESF+) and trends; and
- International good practice exemplars.

The review of existing evidence included a detailed overview of programme aims and horizontal themes, programme goals, funding, and project monitoring, as well as an overview of the challenges that SICAP target groups are currently facing in Ireland. In addition to highlighting the structure of the programme and the needs of the SICAP beneficiaries, this analysis also sought to place SICAP within the wider policy context surrounding social inclusion. The influence of the UN Sustainable Development Goals was considered as well as the EU Cohesion Policy and ESF+, relevant policy on social inclusion and the role of the National Volunteering Strategy in promoting social inclusion. Specific policies that are already aligned with the existing SICAP target groups were covered, as well as policies related to the areas of skill development, climate change, and social enterprises.

As part of the consultation process, the following eight overarching stakeholder groups were identified to engage with over the course of a dedicated consultation programme:

1. Individual Programme Beneficiaries
2. Contract Holders – LCDCs

3. Current Programme Implementers – LDCs
4. Community Group and Social Enterprise Beneficiaries
5. Representative Organisations
6. Community Development Organisations
7. Government Departments and State Agencies
8. Underrepresented Target Groups

These stakeholder groups were selected based on two key criteria:

- Stakeholders who are either directly involved in or influence the structure and/or implementation of SICAP.
- Stakeholders who may be directly impacted by SICAP and the findings of this research (as existing or potential programme beneficiaries).

Subsequently, a mixed methods approach to the research was pursued to collate and integrate both qualitative and quantitative data. The mixed methods approach was deemed most suitable as it provides both numeric metrics driven insights into stakeholder perceptions around the current iteration of SICAP, as well as a deeper understanding of the opinions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of these stakeholders. Thus, a more holistic picture of stakeholder perceptions could be presented. Specifically, three primary means of collecting data were used – online surveys (which collected both quantitative and qualitative data); online workshops or focus groups (which collected qualitative data); and a series of semi-structured interviews and surveys (which also collected qualitative data).

A thematic analysis of this data was then undertaken. Thematic analysis can be broadly understood as a process of identifying patterns or themes within the data. In the first instance, this involved the generation of a set of initial codes, which helped to organise the data in a systematic manner. These codes were continuously reviewed and modified until they could be meaningfully organised into broader themes.

The specific consultation process developed for each stakeholder group is detailed in Chapter 2 – Methodology. Table 1.3 presents the number of participants engaged in the consultations process across the eight stakeholder groups mentioned above.

Table 1.3: Participation to consultation process across stakeholder groups

Stakeholder Group	Survey Participants (No)	Interviews / Workshop /Focus Group Participants (No)
Individual Beneficiaries	646	34
Contract Holders – LCDCs	N/A	24
Current Programme Implementers – LDCs	N/A	56
Community Groups and Social Enterprises	208	N/A
Representative Organisations	N/A	9
Community Development Organisations	N/A	3
Government Departments and State Agencies	5	5
Underrepresented Target Groups*	N/A	18

*The findings from the underrepresented target group consultations are presented in a separate micro-consultation report.

1.3 Report Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows.

Chapter 2 details the research methodology underpinning the primary data collection and analysis, which has been gathered as a result of the consultation process carried out with stakeholder groups, namely individual programme beneficiaries, LCDCs, LDCs, community groups and SE beneficiaries, representative organisations, community development organisations, government departments and state agencies, and underrepresented target groups.

A detailed Programme overview is provided in **Chapter 3**, which elaborates on SICAP’s organisational and governance structure, as well as its target groups, horizontal themes, programme goals, funding, project monitoring and performance. An analysis of the challenges that SICAP target groups face in Ireland is also included. The chapter concludes with a national and international policy review that situates SICAP in an evolving policy context.

The review of SICAP's monitoring and evaluation framework is presented in **Chapter 4**. This analysis informs final recommendations on what has worked well in measuring performance to date, as well as aspects of the programme's monitoring framework that can be improved, as well as suggestions for a revised Monitoring Framework. Particular focus has been given to garner insights into what aspects of the monitoring framework have assisted stakeholders in understanding programme performance and what aspects could be further enhanced. In conducting this exercise, emphasis was also placed on assessing the extent to which current outcomes in the monitoring framework accurately reflect the outcomes of the programme.

Chapter 5 presents the primary thematic discussion points raised across the consultation programme. Each stakeholder group is presented in turn, with detailed consideration of what is working well in the current programme – to inform key elements to retain in the new programme. This is followed by consideration of areas for improvement – to inform key elements to adapt in the new programme. Specific consideration is then given to two core elements SICAP, namely targeting and monitoring.

Conclusions and programme recommendations, including policy areas of consideration for the Department of Rural and Community Development, have been included in **Chapter 6**.

2 Methodology

As indicated previously, SICAP is a social inclusion programme that assists both individuals and groups through a two-pronged approach, namely supporting communities and supporting individuals. SICAP 2018 – 2023 is the current iteration of the programme that seeks to tackle poverty and social exclusion at a local level by funding local engagement and coordinating partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies.

KPMG's review of the current iteration of SICAP seeks to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the current programme, and to consolidate lessons learned to inform the next iteration of SICAP. The review incorporates a desk-based review of existing SICAP evidence, as well as primary data collection with a wide range of programme stakeholders. This chapter sets out the methodological approach underpinning the primary data collection process.

2.1 Primary Data Collection

A total of eight overarching stakeholder groups were identified to engage with over the course of a dedicated consultation programme. These groups are as follows:

1. Individual programme beneficiaries
2. Contract holders – LCDCs
3. Current programme implementers – LDCs
4. Community group and Social Enterprise beneficiaries
5. Representative organisations
6. Community development organisations
7. Government Departments and State Agencies
8. Underrepresented target groups

A specific consultation process was developed for each of these stakeholder groups (as discussed in the sections hereafter). Chapter 5 presents the primary thematic discussion points raised across the consultation programme. Each stakeholder group is presented in turn, with detailed consideration of what is working well in the current programme – to

inform key elements to retain in the new programme. This is followed by consideration of areas for improvement - to inform key elements to adapt in the new programme. Specific consideration is then given to two core elements SICAP:

- 1) **Targeting:** This focus area is concerned with how target groups are targeted by SICAP – i.e., the processes by which SICAP programme implementers identify and effectively engage with potential programme beneficiaries.
- 2) **Monitoring and Outcomes:** This focus area is concerned with how the success of SICAP is measured and understood. The stated purpose of the existing SICAP monitoring framework is to monitor and demonstrate the extent to which the programme outcomes are being achieved. However, the consultation exercise sought to explore whether these outcomes are wholly appropriate in terms of effectively tackling poverty and social exclusion at a local level – and indeed how such efforts can indeed be meaningfully measured in practice.

It should be noted that the analysis presented in Chapter 5 does not purport to set out all individual views expressed during the consultation process, but rather it focuses on the consolidated thematic priorities as identified over the various engagements.

It should further be noted that that the views, opinions and suggestions of consultees presented within Chapter 5 are not those of KPMG. Indeed, KPMG's role within the consultation process was to shape and present questions, capture responses, analyse the feedback, and thematically present it for consideration by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal.

2.1.1 Consultation with Individual Programme Beneficiaries

Direct engagement with individual beneficiaries of the programme was regarded as a vital component of the consultation process. Two avenues for engagement were pursued to capture the perspectives of as many individual beneficiaries as possible.

In the first instance, an online survey was agreed with Pobal and was open for a period of two weeks between 26 July – 9 August 2022. The link to the survey was shared by LDCs among individual beneficiaries of the programme who have

previously consented to receiving communications in relation to future reviews of the programme. The online survey received 646 responses.

Thereafter, nine online focus groups were conducted with individual beneficiaries to complement the findings from the survey – and to enable a more detailed investigation of the key themes arising from this feedback. Invitations were issued on 23 August 2022 and in line with the approach taken for the online survey, LDCs issued a communication to invite consenting individuals to participate. 108 individuals registered to attend on the basis of this invitation. The focus groups were conducted over a three-day period between 30 August – 1 September. Ultimately, 34 individuals attended the online focus groups.

Please see Appendix 1 for the full list of questions included in the survey.

2.1.2 Consultation with Current Programme Implementers - LDCs

Local Development Companies (LDCs) are multi-sectoral partnerships that deliver community and rural development initiatives, labour market activation, social inclusion, climate action and social enterprise services. They are not-for-profit, volunteer-led organisations that provide integrated services so that employment supports, enterprise grants, social inclusion, training, well-being, and environmental supports are available under one roof.

LDCs tender for SICAP funding. Successful tenderers sign funding contracts with their Local Community Development Committee (LCDC, see above) and implement SICAP at the local level. LDCs are represented nationally by the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN).

This phase of the consultation targeted the 46 relevant LDCs that deliver actions on behalf of SICAP. Two stages of online focus group sessions were pursued as follows:

- **LDC Consultation Phase 1:** An initial consultation with LDC CEOs/nominated representatives was carried to ascertain the perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) of SICAP. Representatives from 34 distinct LDCs attended. In this instance, the consultation was targeted at LDC leadership personnel.
- **LDC Consultation Phase 2:** Thereafter, a supplemental consultation was held with a focus on effective strategies for engagement with hard-to-reach target groups –

along with discussions centred on the community development approach. Representatives from 22 distinct LDCs attended this supplemental consultation. In this instance, the consultation was targeted at SICAP practitioners.

Please see Appendix 2 for a full list of questions posed during each of these focus groups.

2.1.3 Consultation with Contract Holders – LCDCs

SICAP is managed by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each local authority area. Each LCDC agrees annual targets for their area based on local needs. LCDCs are independent committees, established in each local authority area, made up of:

- members of the local authority;
- local authority staff;
- people from public bodies who provide funding to the area;
- people from the local community interests;
- people from the local community; and
- people from publicly funded/supported local development groups.

LCDCs, supported by Local Authorities, manage SICAP funding contracts with Local Development Companies (LDCs).

Three online focus groups were conducted with LCDC CEOs and/ or representatives selected on their behalf. A SWOC (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges) analysis was utilised to structure the focus group sessions and to gather insights that would inform the review of the programme. Representatives from 24 distinct LCDCs attended.

Please see Appendix 3 for a full list of questions asked during each of these focus groups.

2.1.4 Consultation with Community Groups and Social Enterprise Beneficiaries

Local Community Groups (LCGs) undertake a range of activities. As stated within the Programme Requirements:

“They can be voluntary groups which work in communities for the public benefit. They might participate in local and regional networks or be a local support group which represents a target group. LCGs supported through SICAP can have different structures and arrangements. The focus or aim of a LCG and its objectives are important rather than the membership of that group”. (p. 17)

Community groups can be focused on addressing the needs of specific target group(s) and/or the needs of specific geographic areas. They do not need to be a legal entity but should have agreed aims and objectives or be a structure with rules (i.e., be an organised group) and may, for example, be an unincorporated association. The groups must be self-governing and not-for-profit enterprises and may rely on the support of volunteers to carry out their activities. These general characteristics leave room for groups to take on a structure that best suits their needs.

A Social Enterprise (SE) is an enterprise:

- That trades for a social/societal purpose;
- Where at least part of its income is earned from its trading activity;
- Is separate from government; and
- Where the surplus is primarily re-invested in the social objective.

LCGs and SEs were the focus of this stage of the consultation which was pursued by means of an online survey. There were 208 responses to this survey. Please see Appendix 4 for the full list of questions included in the survey.

2.1.5 Consultation with Representative Organisations

This stage of the consultation targeted national level organisations representing programme target groups in Ireland. Specifically, the following eight organisations were engaged:

- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)
- National Traveller Partnership
- One Family Ireland
- Family Resource Centre National Forum

- National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCi)
- New Communities Partnership
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- Pavee Point

The original intention was to consult with these organisations as part of a single focus group. However, due to availability constraints a total of 5 focus groups were held (with some thus including 2-3 groups each) – each covering the same semi structured questions. Please see Appendix 5 for a full list of questions posed within these focus groups.

2.1.6 Consultation with Government Departments and State Agencies

This phase of the consultation targeted relevant Government Departments and State Agencies. SICAP is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) with co-funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), initially as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. The programme structure has been set by the DRCD but is also influenced and shaped by National Government policy and priorities. Hence, a wider understanding of the role and success of SICAP from the perspective of relevant Government Departments and State Agencies was considered important.

Specifically, the following Departments and Agencies were contacted as part of the research – as agreed with Pobal:

- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
- Department of Health (DoH)
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)
- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)
- Department of Social Protection (DoSP)
- Department of Justice (DoJ)
- ESRI
- SOLAS

Two avenues for consultation were developed. In the first instance an online survey was published and was open for a period of one week between 17 – 24 August 2022. Five submissions were made via the online survey, from the following organisations:

- DoSP
- DoH
- DoJ
- SOLAS
- ESRI

Thereafter, a follow up virtual focus group took place to discuss the survey submissions and to receive additional feedback. This was held on 12 September and was attended by representatives of the following organisations:

- DFHERIS
- ESRI
- DCEDIY
- DPER

On request, and due to availability constraints, a separate focus group was held with the DoSP. Each focus group covered the same semi structured questions.

Please see Appendix 6 for the full list of questions included in the survey.

2.1.7 Consultation with Underrepresented Target Groups

Following on from engagement with individual beneficiaries, focused engagement took place with underrepresented target groups – i.e., the SICAP target groups that are perceived to be currently underrepresented within the Programme. To establish a validated list of underrepresented target groups, KPMG referred to a number of relevant sources.

In the first instance, KPMG referred to the SICAP Annual Report (2021)⁷, wherein a number of **national priority groups** have been established. These national priority groups “reflect current national policy, learning from SICAP to date, low representation

⁷ [SICAP Annual Report \(2021\) | Pobal](#)

of certain target groups on the caseload, and acute needs highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The national priority groups were:

- **Travellers/ Roma**
- **New Communities with particular focus on those living in Direct Provision**
- **Long Term Unemployed**
- **Older People and isolation**
- **Mental Health (including youth)**

Given the reiteration of **“Travellers/ Roma, New Communities and Long Term Unemployed”** as SICAP target groups and national priority groups, these target groups were selected as the focus of the subsequent individual beneficiaries’ engagement.

Soon thereafter, Pobal published the Social Inclusion Analysis Report (2022) that provides Lot level social inclusion data across a variety of indicators relevant to SICAP. Findings from this report suggest that **“People with Disabilities”** and **“Lone Parent”** target groups are currently underrepresented within SICAP. Therefore, these two target groups were also selected as the focus of the subsequent individual beneficiaries’ engagements.

Ultimately, five underrepresented target groups were proposed to frame the subsequent individual beneficiary engagements. These are:

- Travellers and Roma
- New Communities
- Long Term Unemployed
- Lone Parents
- People with Disabilities

It should be noted that this consultation exercise is subject to a parallel engagement process. The findings will be reported in a separate micro consultation report.

2.1.8 Community Development Organisations

Three semi-structured interviews were carried out with the following community development organisations:

- The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
- The Wheel
- Community Work Ireland (CWI)

The ILDN is the representative body for Ireland’s Local Development Companies. The ILDN has 49 members, all not-for-profit organisations, building inclusive, vibrant communities and better life chances for people in every part of Ireland. Of its 49 members, 46 deliver SICAP.

It should be noted that the ILDN submitted a position paper to DRCD (and thus the KPMG team) on the next iteration of SICAP. This document was the result of a consultative process organised by the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) for its members, the Local Development Companies (LDCs) that deliver SICAP. The paper, according to the ILDN, aims to contribute constructively to the development process for the next iteration of SICAP from the perspective of Local Development Companies, due to their experience of delivering it on the ground.

ILDN also participated in a semi-structured interview session the themes raised in the paper (all centred around the stated idea of “adjustments rather than redesign”) were discussed – and these are reflected below.

A further semi-structured interview was carried out with a representative from ‘The Wheel’ – Ireland’s national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises. As a supportive resource, The Wheel offer advice, training, and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the charity and community sector.

Finally, a third semi-structured interview was undertaken with CWI. CWI is a national organisation that promotes and supports community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion, and inequality; promoting, protecting, and advancing human rights and ultimately achieving social change that will contribute to the creation of a just, sustainable, and equal society. In 2022, as the current iteration of SICAP entered its final year and as planning for the new programme gets underway, CWI and AIEB (All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training) organised two workshops with CWI members to explore experiences of working on or engaging with SICAP from a community work perspective. CWI shared a report with KPMG stemming from this exercise entitled “Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2023: A Community Work Perspective - Report of CWI and AIEB Consultation 2022”.

2.2 Scope

2.2.1 Overview

The following sections provide further context around the consultees deemed to be beneficiaries of SICAP and who participated in either or both an online survey and an online focus group.

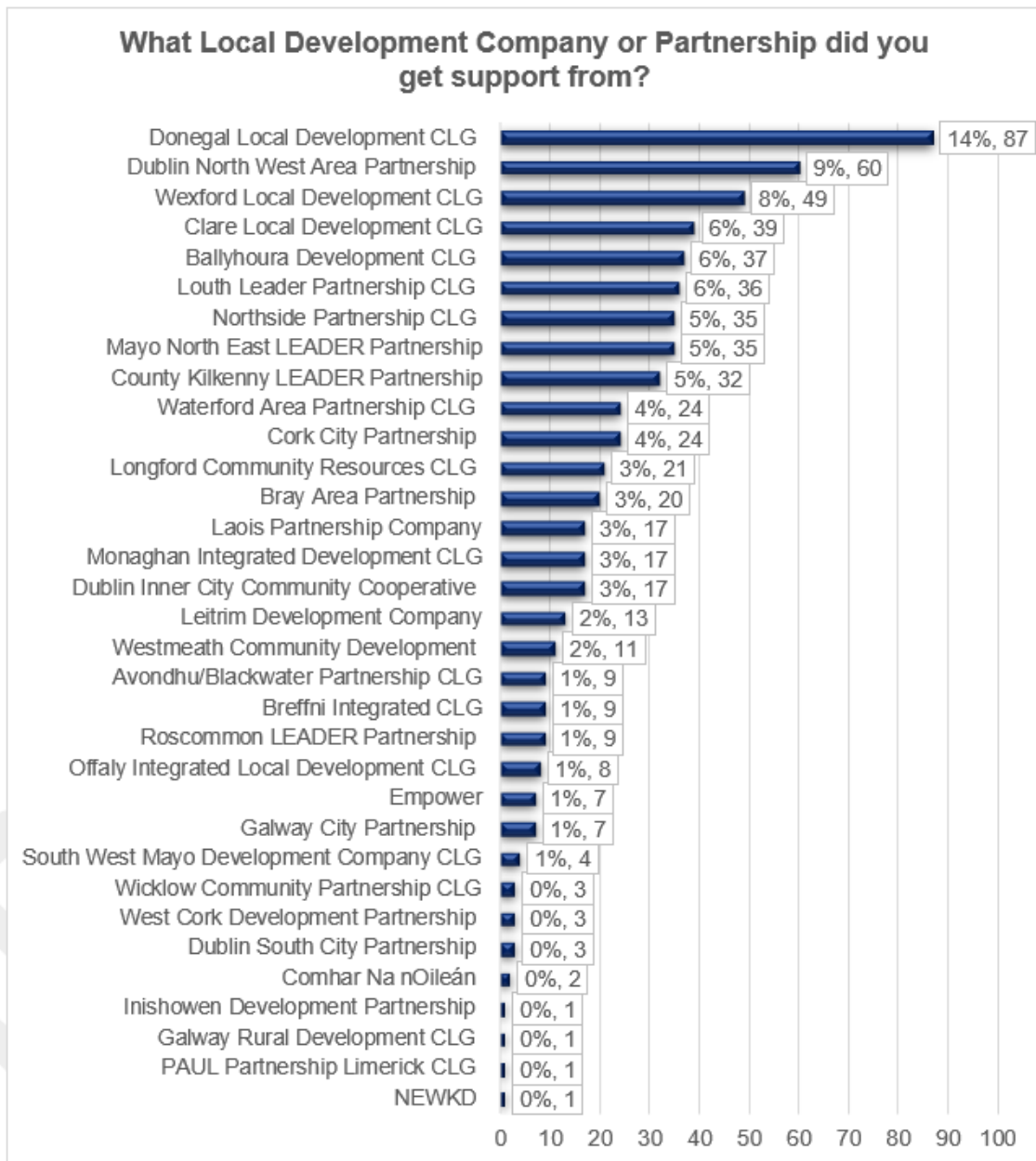
2.2.2 Consultation with Individual Programme Beneficiaries

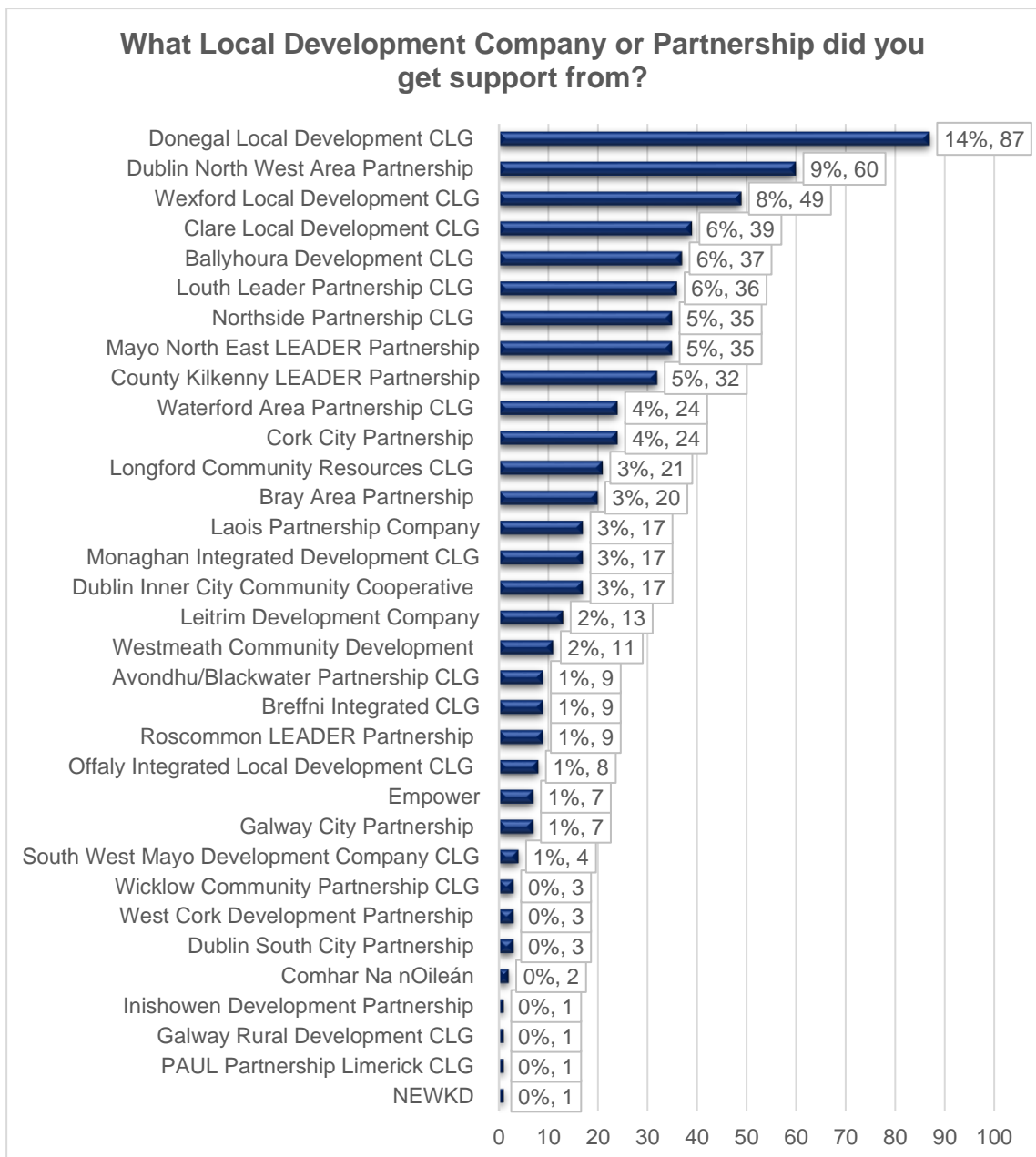
2.2.3 Individual Beneficiaries

2.2.3.1 Online Survey

As indicated above, a customised online survey was disseminated through LDCs to individual beneficiaries of SICAP supports. Figure 2.1 shows the respondents' connection with 33 LDC or Partnership offices. Donegal Local Development was the company most frequently cited by respondents (14%), followed up by the Dublin Northwest Partnership (9%) and Wexford Local Development (8%).

Figure 2.1: Online Survey Respondents LDC / Partnership Affiliation





Figures **Figure 2.2-**

Figure 2.6 present the demographic characteristics of the online survey respondents. The majority (61%) of participants were male and just under half (49%) of participants were under 45 years old.

Most participants (52%) had completed third level education, with a further 25% having attained some form of post-secondary education. In terms of employment, nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents had either full-time (17%) or part-time

(20%) employment or were self-employed (25%). Only 28% of participants were unemployed and 3% were carers or assisting relatives.

Most respondents owned their house (42%), or either rented a whole house or apartment (26%) or a room in an apartment or house (6%). Just over 15% stayed with family or friends, and 3% of respondents lived in emergency accommodation.

As far as group identification is concerned, it is worth noting that respondents could indicate belonging to more than one group. The following responses were recorded:

- 70 respondents indicated having a disability (with a further 39 preferring not to say);
- 4 respondents indicated that they are members of the Traveller community (with a further 20 preferring not to say);
- 5 respondents indicated that they are members of the Roma community (with a further 17 preferring not to say);
- 179 respondents indicated that they were born outside of Ireland (with a further 17 preferring not to say);
- 25 respondents indicated that they are refugees (with a further 17 preferring not to say);
- 94 respondents indicated that they are single parents (with a further 15 preferring not to say); and
- 178 respondents indicated that they are currently unemployed (with a further 47 preferring not to say).

Figure 2.2: Individual Beneficiaries Survey – Gender

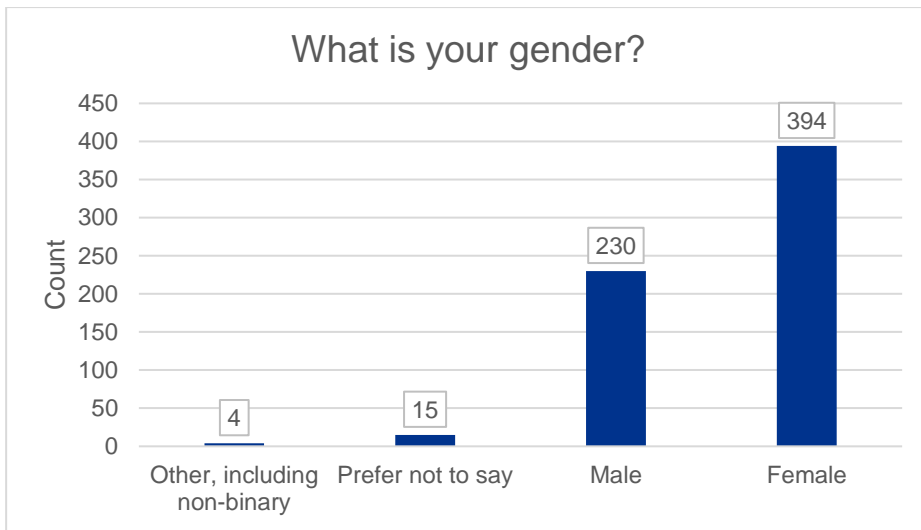


Figure 2.3: Individual Beneficiaries Survey – Age

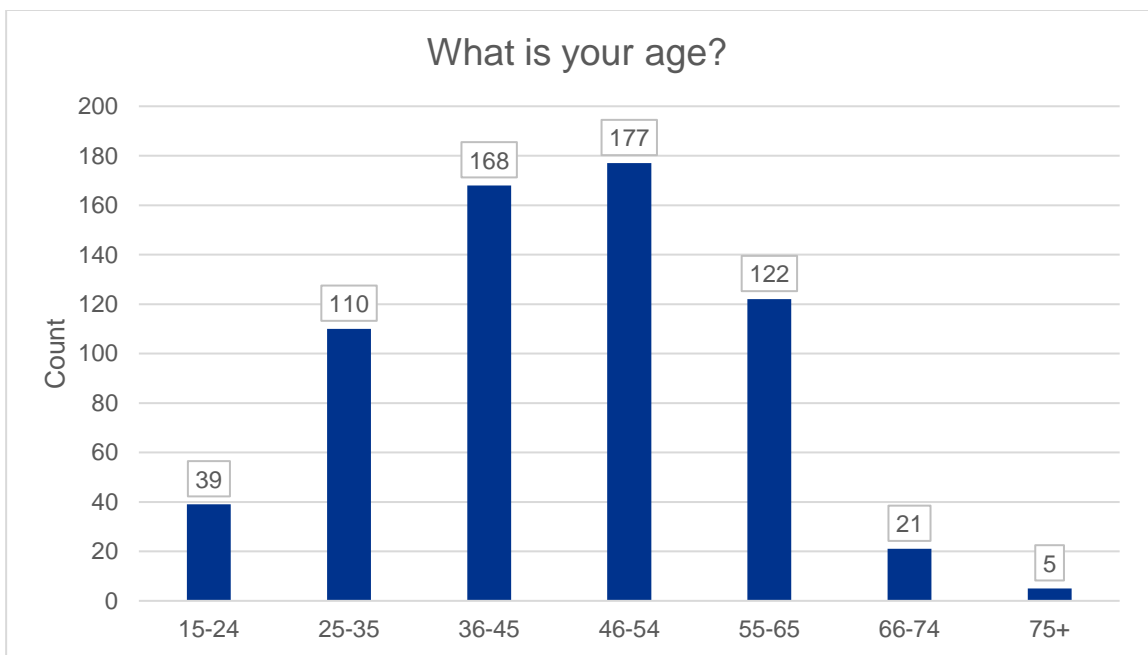


Figure 2.4: Individual Beneficiaries Survey – Education

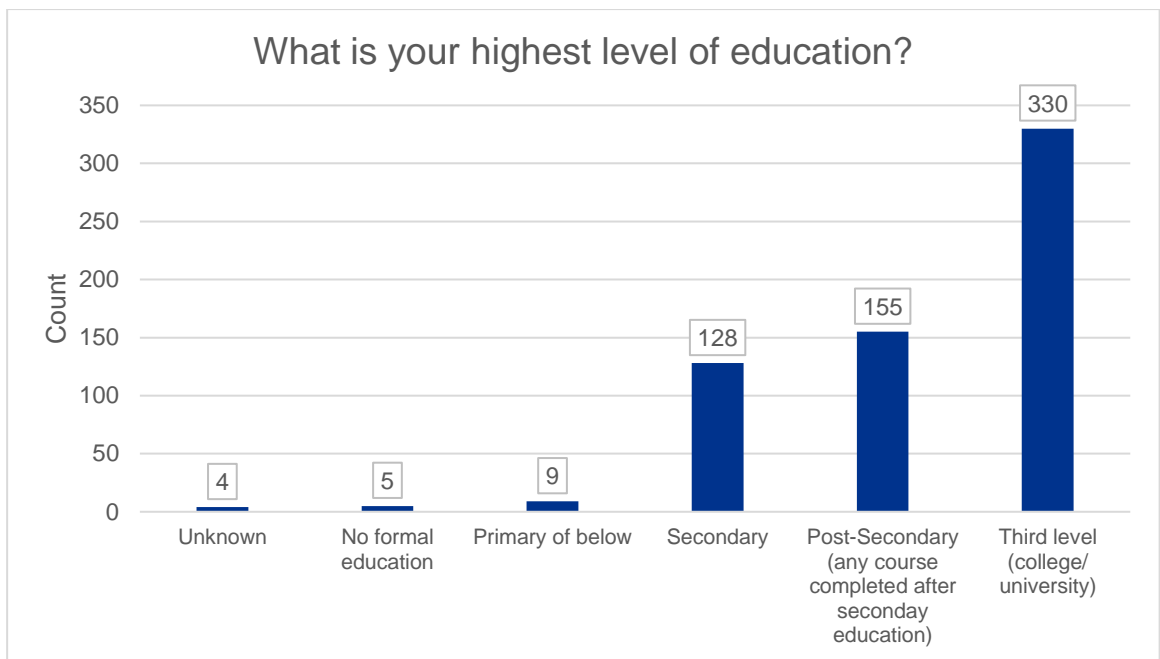


Figure 2.5: Individual Beneficiaries Survey – Current Employment Status

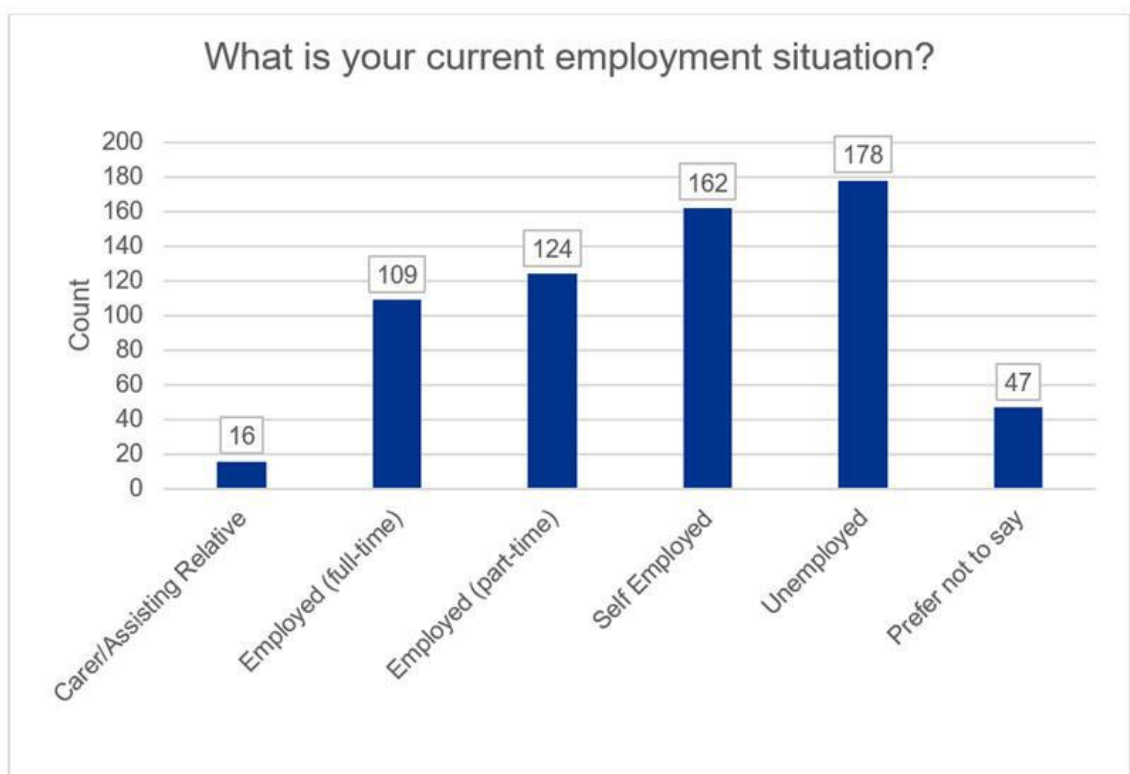
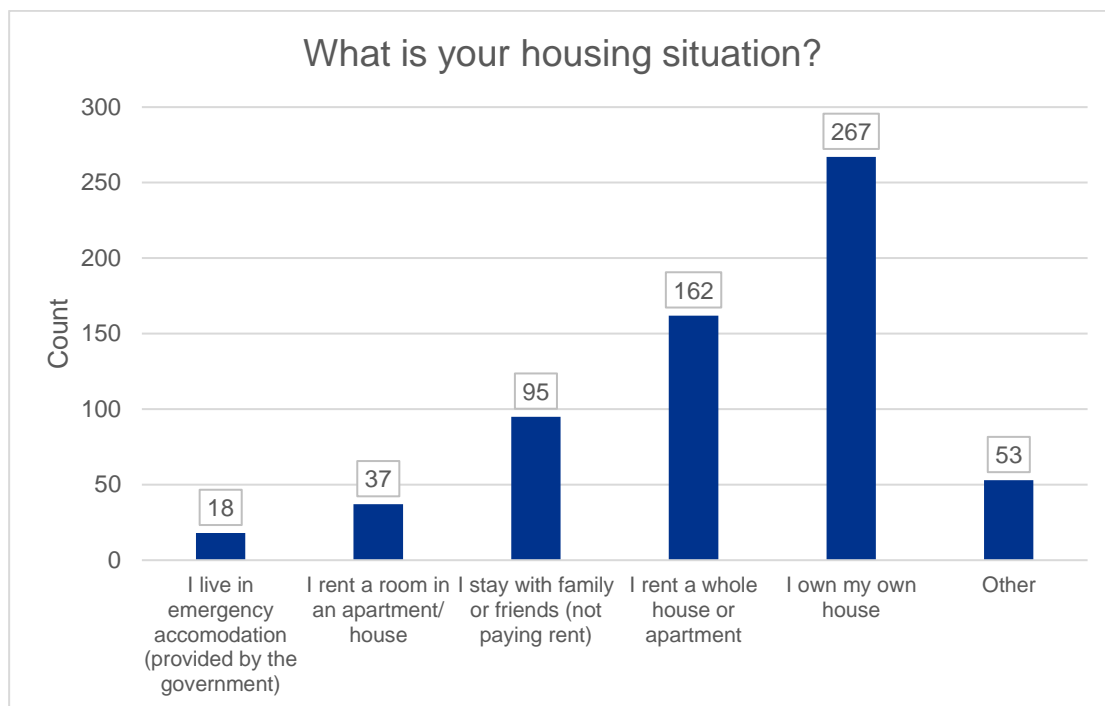


Figure 2.6: Individual Beneficiaries Survey – Current Accommodation



2.2.3.2 Focus Groups

Online focus groups were conducted with consenting individual beneficiaries to delve deeper into the findings of the online survey and explore their individual experience with the programme in more depth. The focus groups were conducted over a three-day period between 30th of August – 1st of September. Group sizes were set to a maximum of 12 individuals per group and each focus group took place for one hour. Individuals were randomly selected to attend a session based on their availability.

Figures Figure 2.7-Figure 2.11 present the demographic characteristics of the 30 focus group participants who agreed to fill in a survey after these sessions. The majority (22) of respondents were female and just under half (14) were younger than 45 years old. In terms of target group self-identification, one participant identified as a Traveller and another one as a refugee. Furthermore, eleven participants indicated having been born outside Ireland, three participants indicated having a disability, and seven participants said they were single parents. No participants identified as being part of the Roma community.

Most participants (17) had completed third level education, with a further seven having attained some form of post-secondary education. In terms of employment, only one participant was employed full time. Eight participants were in part-time employment, and another seven were self-employed. Additionally, ten participants were unemployed, and one identified as a carer.

Figure 2.7: Online Focus Groups Participants – Age

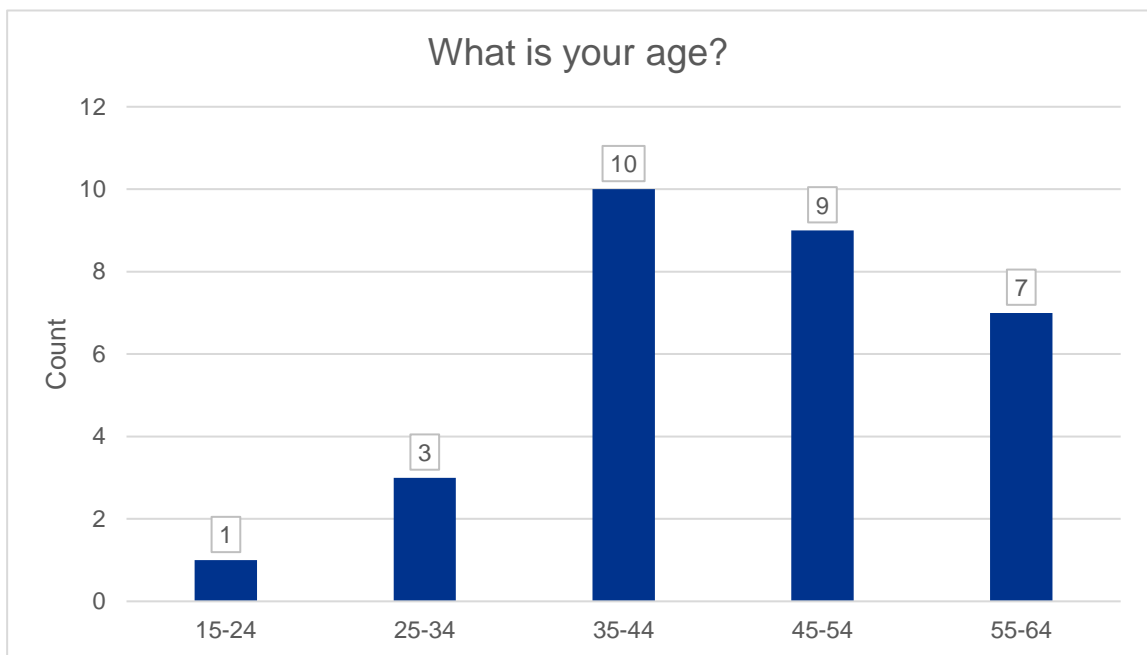


Figure 2.8: Online Focus Groups Participants – Target Group Self-Identification

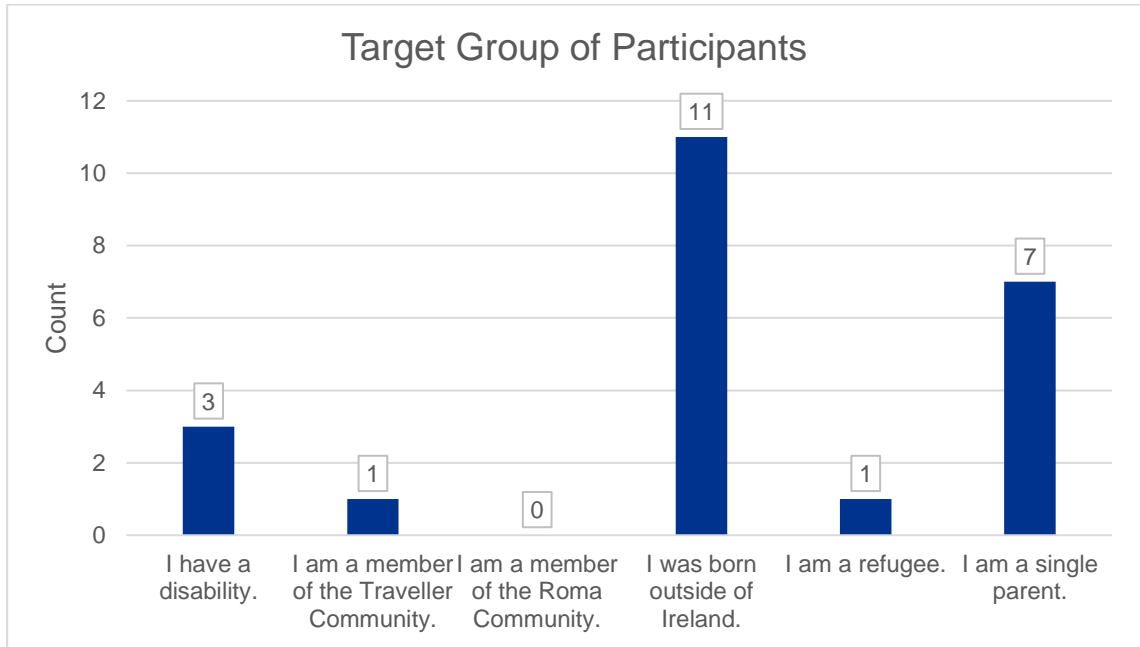


Figure 2.9: Online Focus Groups Participants – Gender

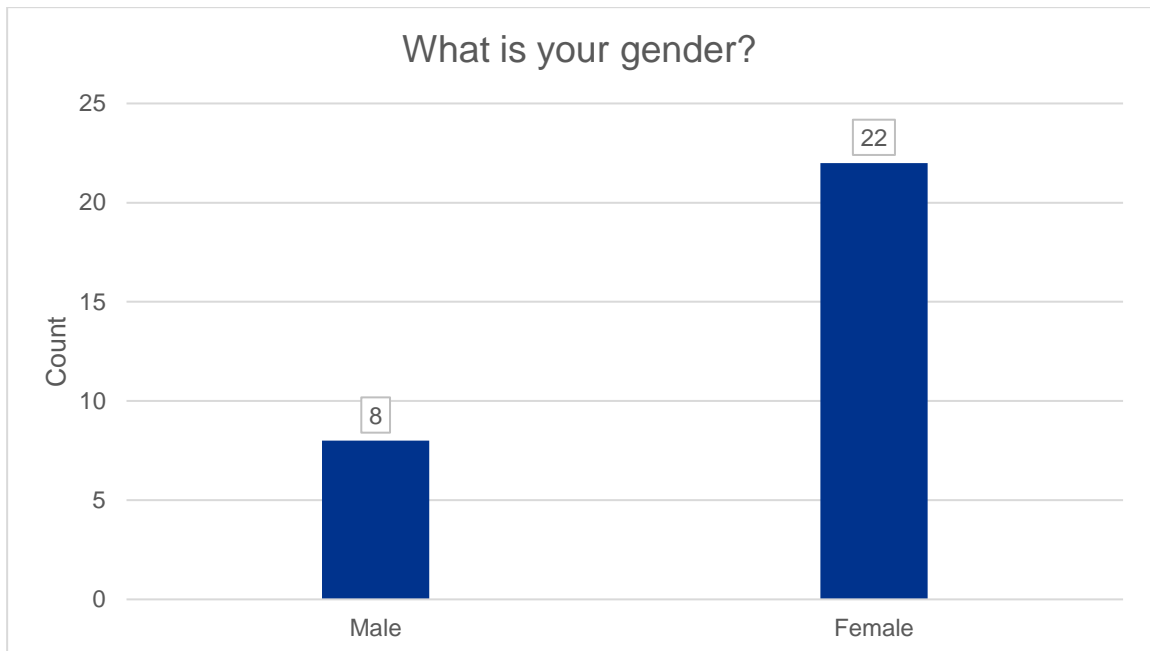


Figure 2.10: Online Focus Groups Participants – Highest Level of Educational Attainment

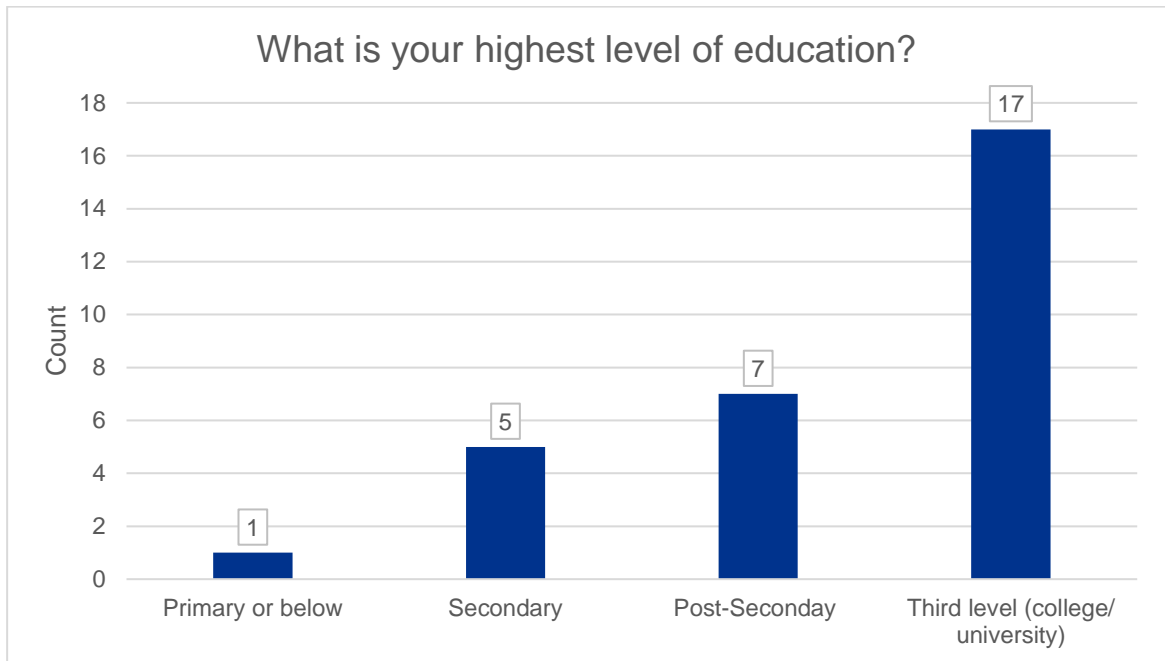
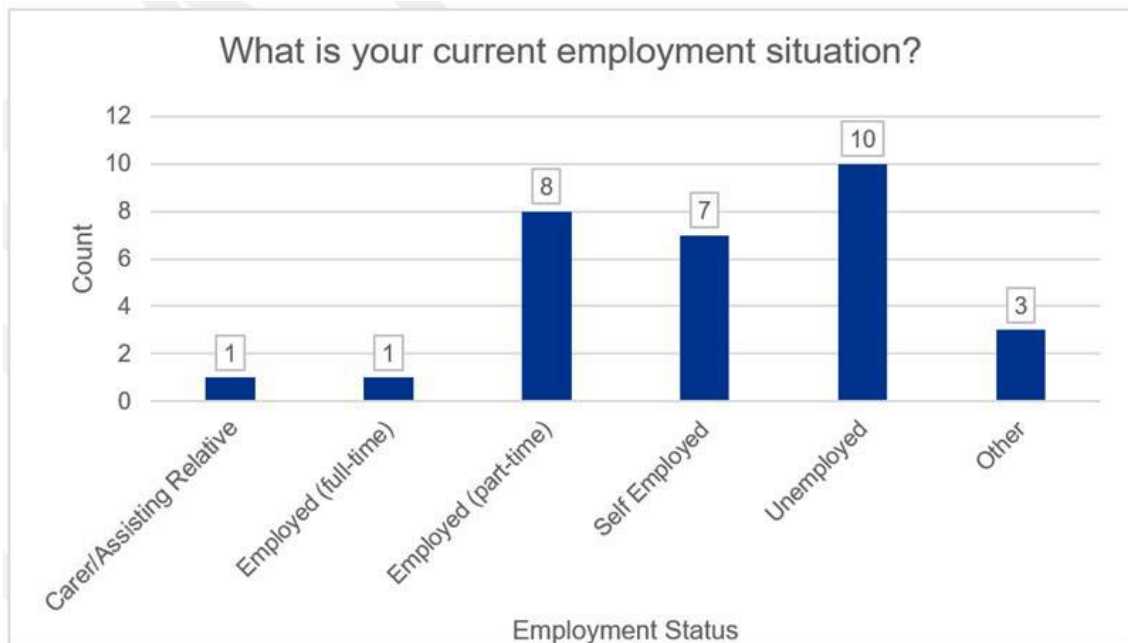


Figure 2.11: Online Focus Groups Participants – Current Employment Status



2.2.4 Community Groups and Social Enterprises

Consultation with LCGs and SEs was pursued by means of an online survey that recorded a total of 208 responses.

2.2.4.1 Key Statistics: Employees; Volunteers; and Annual Incomes

In terms of the numbers of full-time employees each respondent currently has, the results are as follows:

No. of stated full-time employees per respondent

No. of full-time employees	No. Respondents
0	7
1-5	38
6-10	15
11-20	7
21-30	3
More than 30	3
More than 80	1

In terms of the numbers of part-time employees each respondent currently has, the results are as follows:

No. of stated part-time employees per respondent

No. of part-time employees	No. Respondents
0	11
1-5	47
6-10	9
11-20	9
21-30	2
More than 30	5
More than 80	1

In terms of the numbers of volunteers each respondent currently works with, the results are as follows:

No. of stated volunteers per respondent

No. of volunteers	No. Respondents
0	1
1-5	15
6-10	25
11-20	31

21-30	10
More than 30	18
More than 80	4

In terms of annual incomes,

Annual Incomes	% of Respondents
More than €250,000	41%
Between €200,000 - €250,000	8%
Between €150,000 – €200,000	8%
Between €100,000 – €150,000	11%
Between €50,000 – €100,000	14%
Less than €50,000	16%

2.2.4.2 SICAP Target Group Services and Representation

- 164 respondents indicated that their LCG/SE currently has employees/volunteers from SICAP target groups.
- 138 respondents indicated that their LCG/SE provides services to more than one SICAP target group.
- Participating LCGs and SE's provide services mostly to “people living in disadvantaged communities” (97 LCGs/SE's), “people with disabilities” (88 LCGs/SE's) and “the unemployed” (87 LCGs/SE's).
- Overall, there were less participating LCGs and SE's providing services to “Travellers” (45 LCGs/SE's) and “Roma” (17 LCGs/SE's)

2.2.4.3 Further Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Figures 2.11 – 2.13 present further characteristics of the online survey respondents.

Figure 2.11: Groups Legal Form

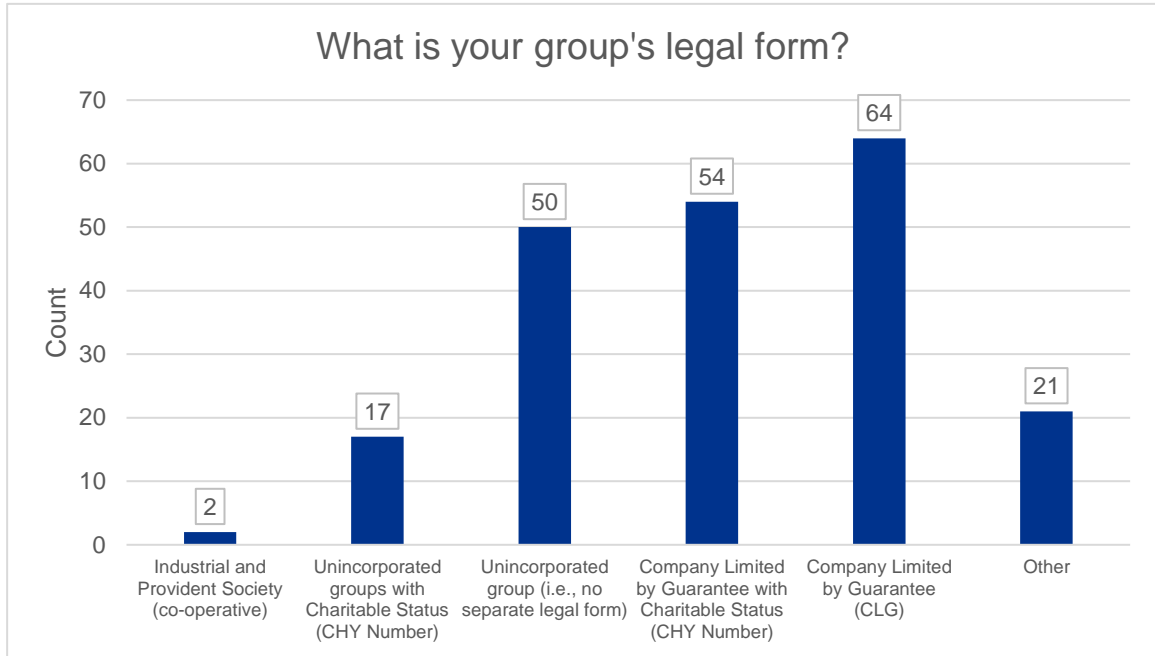


Figure 2.12: Charity Type

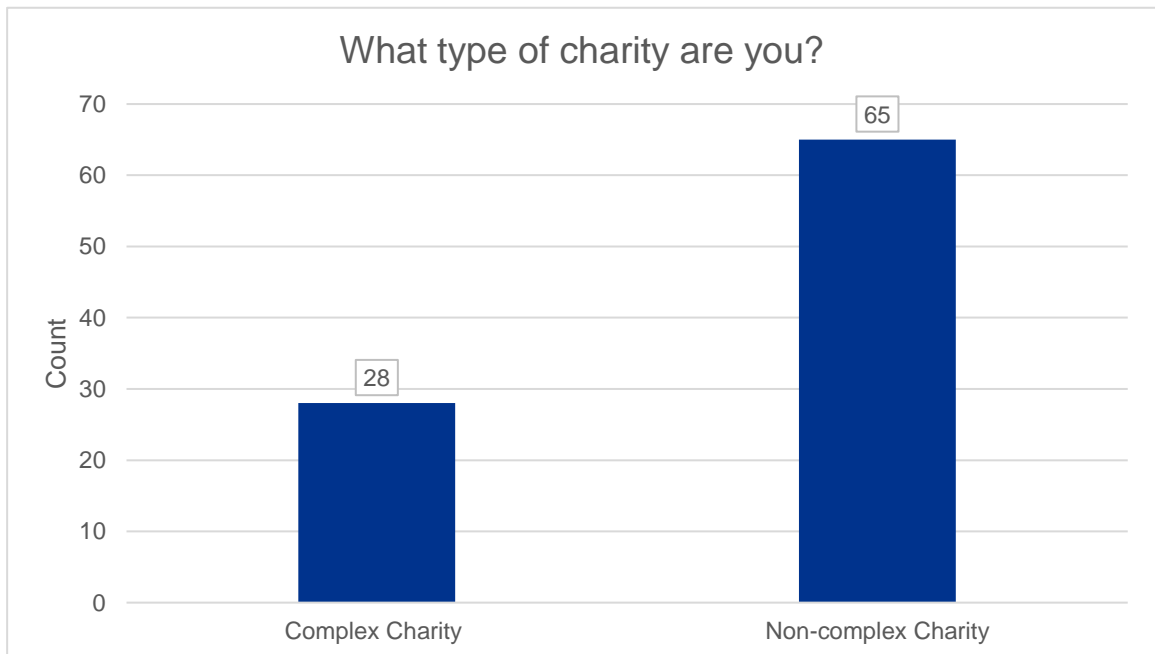
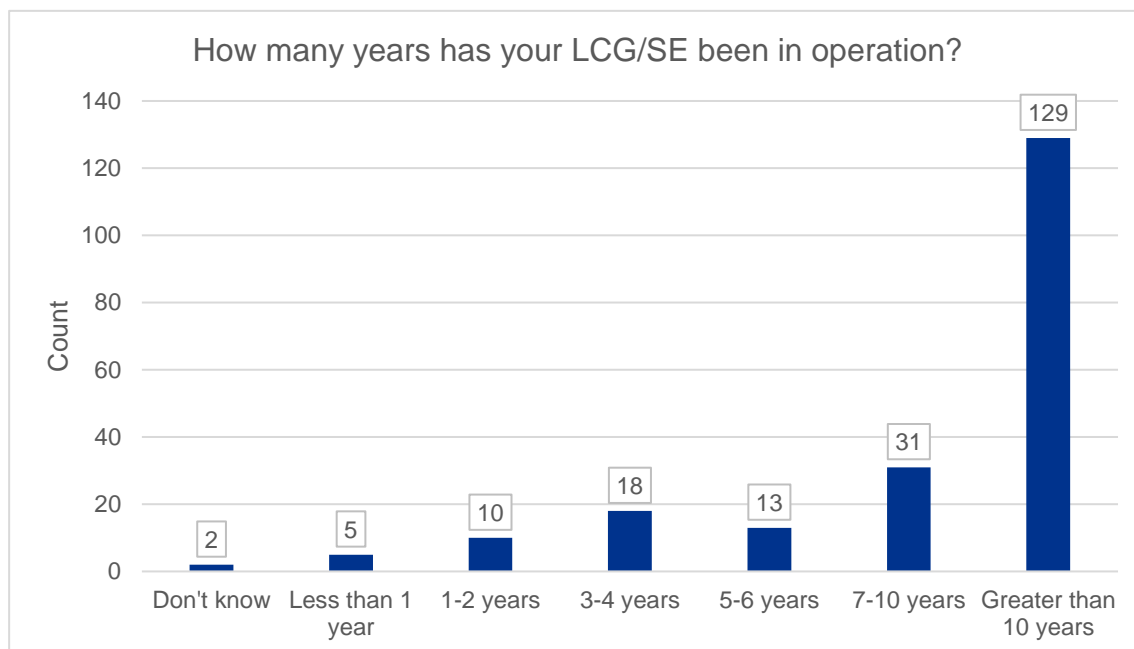


Figure 2.13: Years in Operation



2.3 Approach to Analysis

As stated previously, the overarching aim of this review of SICAP 2018-2023 is to review the relevance and effectiveness of the current programme, and to consolidate lessons learned to inform the next iteration of SICAP. In seeking to achieve this core aim, a dedicated consultation programme was developed to ascertain the views and perspectives of eight stakeholder groups, as previously set out. These stakeholder groups were selected based on two key criteria:

- Stakeholders who are either directly involved in or influence the structure and/or implementation of SICAP.
- Stakeholders who may be directly impacted by SICAP and the findings of this research (as existing or potential programme beneficiaries).

A mixed methods approach to the research was pursued – collating and integrating both qualitative and quantitative data. The mixed methods approach was deemed most suitable as it provides both numeric-driven metrics into stakeholder perceptions around the current iteration of SICAP as well as a deeper understanding of the opinions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of these stakeholders. Thus, a more holistic picture of stakeholder perceptions could be presented.

Specifically, three primary means of collecting data were used – online surveys (which collected both quantitative and qualitative data); online workshops or focus groups (which generated qualitative data); and a series of semi structured interviews surveys (which also collected qualitative data).

A thematic analysis of this data was then undertaken. Thematic analysis can be broadly understood as a process of identifying patterns or themes within the data. In the first instance, this involved the generation of a set of initial codes, which helped to organise the data in a systematic manner. These codes were continuously reviewed and modified until they could be meaningfully organised into broader themes.

Chapter 5 presents the primary thematic discussion points raised across the consultation programme. Each stakeholder group is presented in turn, with detailed consideration of what is working well in the current programme – to inform key elements to retain in the new programme. This is followed by consideration of areas for improvement to inform key elements to adapt in the new programme. Specific consideration is then given to the two core focus areas of the review: 1) Targeting and 2) Monitoring and Outcomes.

3 Literature Review and Policy Context

3.1 Introduction

As outlined in SICAP's Programme Requirements 2018-2023, social inclusion

“...is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in the society in which they live”.⁸

Some groups confront barriers that prevent them from fully participating in political, economic, and social life.⁹ These groups can be excluded through, for example, legal systems, land, and labour markets, but also discriminatory or stigmatising attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions. Disadvantage, it is affirmed, is often based on gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), among other factors.

Since 1997, Ireland has developed national anti-poverty strategies to provide a strategic framework to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Over time, a range of national sectoral strategies have been developed across government departments that include social inclusion as a core objective. Indeed, in January 2020, the “Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025” set out the Government’s ambition for Ireland to become one of the most socially inclusive States in the EU.¹⁰

Specifically, the Roadmap aims to reduce the number of people in consistent poverty in Ireland to 2% or less and to position Ireland within the top five countries in the EU under several leading social inclusion measures. The Roadmap also goes further than its predecessors in its explicit recognition that a person’s well-being is not something that can be measured simply by reference to relative income measures but needs to be considered holistically, taking account of housing, health, community, education and family considerations.

⁸ SICAP Programme Requirements (2018-2023) | Pobal

⁹ Social Inclusion | World Bank

¹⁰ Roadmap for Social Inclusion (2020-2025) | Government of Ireland

The Roadmap further acknowledges that while evolving definitions of poverty and social exclusion are welcome, these often focus on what we, as a society or nation, want to avoid. Conversely, it emphasises the Government’s intention to focus on what we are striving to achieve, with a focus on the positive difference that policy can and should make to the lives of people and to our society.

The Roadmap recognises SICAP as the Government’s “primary social inclusion intervention” and a “significant approach” in empowering communities through the frontline staff of Local Development Companies. This chapter provides an overview of SICAP, and its target groups. It charts their evolving needs over time, as well as the policy context surrounding SICAP and the performance of the current iteration of the programme since 2018. This review aims to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the current programme, and to consolidate lessons learned to inform the next iteration of SICAP, which is expected to commence in 2024. The review is further strengthened through primary data collection with a wide range of programme stakeholders.

3.2 Programme Overview

3.2.1 Programme Details

SICAP is managed by the 33 Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and delivered by Programme Implementers (PIs) (typically Local Development Companies or LDCs) who are responsible for 51 Lots across Ireland. The discrepancy between LCDCs and PIs is driven primarily by the geographical spread of the population with higher density urban locations being subdivided into smaller lots to better facilitate their engagement. The task of PIs is to reflect the broad scope of the programme in their actions and use programme funding to strengthen communities and improve people’s lives.

The current iteration of SICAP is scheduled to operate from 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2023. SICAP is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development with co-funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020 for the years 2018 through 2020. PEIL’s priority areas for investment revolve around the activation of the unemployed, social and labour market inclusion, education and youth employment. The programme had a total operating budget of €39.1 million, supporting over 570 FTE staff in 2020. PEIL was succeeded by Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) 2021-2027 under ESF+.

3.2.2 Target Groups

SICAP's 13 target groups are the beneficiaries of the programme, which seeks to promote inclusion and participation of these groups within wider society. The programme seeks to reengage those who are isolated from mainstream services or from wider society through a targeted and selective approach. Table 3.1 lists the 13 target groups in no particular order.

Table 3.1: SICAP Target Groups

Adapted from SICAP Programme Requirements 2018 – 2023

Disadvantaged Children and Families	Children or Families that are socially or economically disadvantaged, including members of the target groups or those who are experiencing other forms of disadvantage.
People living in disadvantaged communities	People living within areas defined as Disadvantaged, Very Disadvantaged, and extremely disadvantaged as per Pobal HP Deprivation Index.
Disadvantaged Young People (aged 15-24)	Young people who are between the ages of 15 and 24, who are engaged with the programme while facing a form of disadvantage.
People with Disabilities	SICAP's understanding of disability is broad and draws upon a number of recognised national and international definitions. It draws on the definition of disability within the Disability Act (2005) but applies a wider definition where broader socioeconomic complexities relating to disability are acknowledged and where mental health issues are often significant.
Disadvantaged Women	Women engaging with the programme are at additional need from the specific challenges affecting women including gendered expectations, roles, violence.
Roma	An umbrella term to refer to a number of different groups such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom and Lom and others.
Emerging Needs Group	An LCDC chosen group to allow the programme to respond to "emerging needs" within the local community.
Travellers	Members of the Irish Traveller Community.
Lone Parents	Any individual who is living in a single adult household and raising dependent children and/or young people on their own.
The Disengaged from the Labour Market (Economically Inactive)	People who are disengaged from the labour market are those who are not classed as unemployed because they are not receiving job seeker supports.

Low Income Workers/ Households	People or households determined to be at risk of poverty.
The Unemployed	Those who are without work but seeking employment.
New Communities	Any individual who is a migrant experiencing disadvantage, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Each of these groups faces issues of disadvantage and marginalisation some of which overlap, particularly so in cases where individuals are members of more than one target group. We consider the challenges faced by the target groups thematically in Section 3.7.

3.2.3 Organisational / Governance Structure

The programme is structured around five different agencies, including the Department of Rural and Community Development (supported by Pobal), the Local Authorities and their Local Community Development Committees, the Programme Implementers.

3.2.3.1 The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)

The DRCD acts as the lead department for the Programme as well as providing the funding for the programme in conjunction with the ESF. Funding is provided to implementers through Local Authorities and then on to the implementers. The DRCD is responsible for the targets, policy context and priorities, and acts as the ultimate decision maker on the programmes operation.

3.2.3.2 Local Authorities

Local Authorities provide administrative support to their nominated LCDC to manage the programme. The Local Authority issues payments to the Programme Implementers subject to the approval of the LCDC and oversees the project to ensure compliance of the Implementor with their obligations.

3.2.3.3 Local Community Development Committees

The LCDCs, of which there are 33 nationally, are the local level manager of SICAP who directly oversee the work of Implementers within their area and direct funding to them to support their work. They are the key decision-making body for the programme's planning, monitoring, and evaluation. LCDCs operate the programme's performance criteria, including the annual and mid-year review of the programme's performance. They also prepare the relevant documentation for ESF in their role as a beneficiary to that programme.

3.2.3.4 Programme Implementers

PIs are directly responsible for the delivery of SICAP to beneficiaries who either directly access SICAP services and supports or are referred to the scheme by other relevant agencies. SICAP beneficiaries may be referred to the programme by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to ensure sufficient supports are provided to those in need. PIs may receive referrals from Intreo and other services such as the Local Employment Service and JobPath etc and provide supports while co-operating with any protocols agreed by DSP, DRCD and the LCDC locally.

PIs create and deliver reports to the LCDCs at the scheduled intervals as well as answering ad hoc queries. They are responsible for the engagements and actions undertaken to deliver the programme. They are also required to keep records of the interventions and progress made in achieving the programme's targeted goals.

3.3 Programme Aim and Horizontal Themes

3.3.1 Programme Aim

The aim of SICAP is to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality in Ireland through supporting communities and individuals using community development approaches, engagement and collaboration.¹¹

3.3.2 Horizontal Themes

The programme is supported by a set of horizontal themes that guide and shape the work of the entire programme and the actions of the stakeholders responsible for management and delivery of SICAP.¹² These themes ensure that the programme work delivers for all stakeholders – building their capacity, defending their autonomy, and respecting their particular circumstances. The three horizontal themes are:

1. Promoting an equality framework with a particular focus on gender equality and anti-discrimination practices:
 - a. Incorporate the principles of the Equal Status Act 2000-2015 into their work and ensure that no one's needs are an impediment to their participation in the programme. All groups should be treated as being of equal worth, and not subject to prejudice or stereotyping. PIs must ensure that equality work (i.e., work that promotes a more equal society) is carried out within the Local Community Groups supported under the scheme.
 - b. Incorporate gender equality principles through the recognition of differences between people of different genders and the difficulties a

¹¹ SICAP End of Year Report (2018) | Pobal

¹² SICAP End of Year Report (2018) | Pobal

person might face as a result of their gender. Some women might experience multi-faceted disadvantage as a result of their gender and their membership within another target group or disadvantaged community. PIs must reflect on their processes to avoid unconscious bias and promote an equal workplace for men and women.

2. Applying community development approaches to achieve the participation of disadvantaged and marginalised communities in the wider local development context.
 - a. A community development approach must underpin the work of the programme. This approach seeks “social change to achieve equality, social justice, and human rights ... (through) the application of principles of participation, empowerment, and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way”.¹³ This approach develops the capacity of the communities engaged with as part of the programme to ensure their ability to influence and shape the needs that SICAP will aim to address.
3. Developing collaborative approaches with stakeholders to improve how mainstream policies and programmes are delivered so that they impact more positively on the socially excluded.
 - a. Collaborative processes seek for SICAP to build synergies with other national, regional, and local strategies to reduce overlap and dependency while building capacity. A collaborative approach, especially with other government agencies, improves the sustainability of the change and allows for successful SICAP pilots to be mainstreamed more effectively. PIs are therefore critical agents in the facilitation of interagency cooperation and the promotion of collaborative approaches.
 - b. Maintaining a local focus to permit effective and rapid local responses to developments on a local level. In this way, the programme functions as a national programme acutely responsive to local needs of target groups subject to the solutions being within the scope and spirit of the SICAP approach.

3.4 Programme Goals

This section reviews the two SICAP goals.

3.4.1 Goal 1: Supporting Communities

Goal 1 comprises five thematic areas with 12 associated outcomes which are the cornerstone of the SICAP Community Development approach. Engagement with LCGs and SEs under the programme is designed to build their capacity and foster deeper

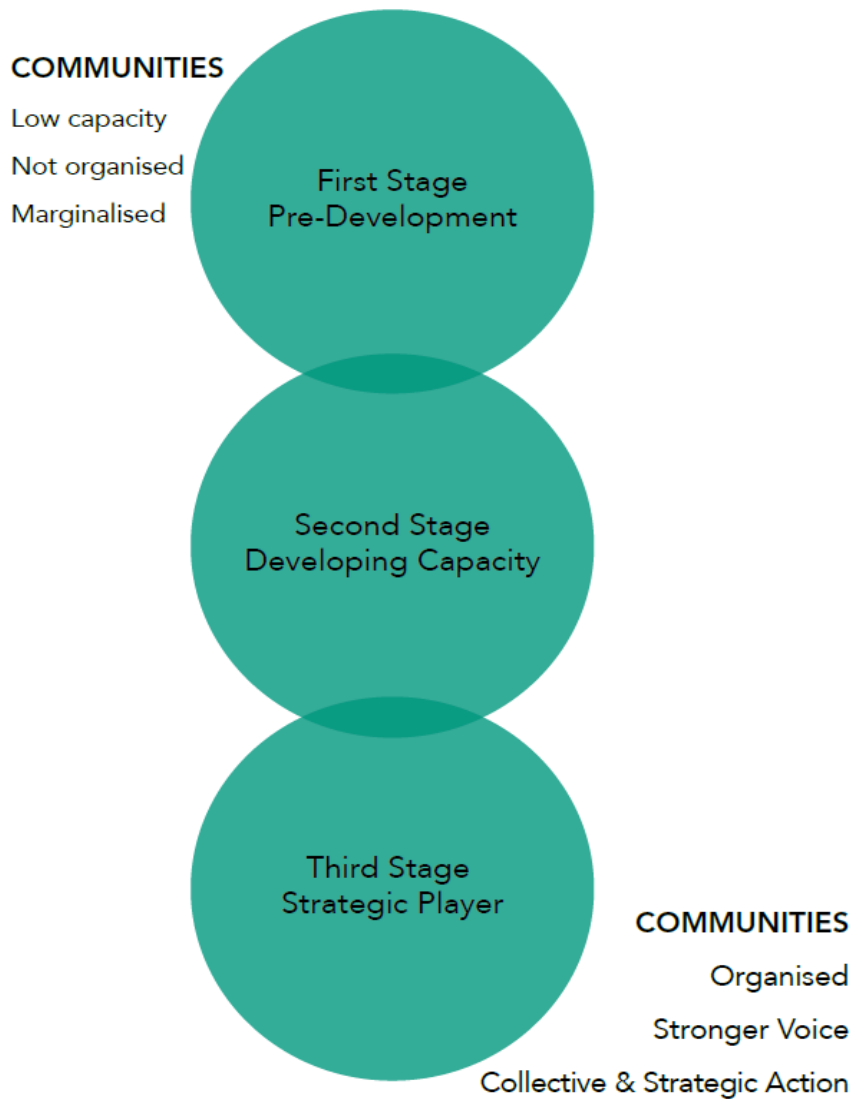
¹³ SICAP Programme Requirements (2018-2023) | Pobal

inclusion for relevant stakeholders. PIs actions seek to form and build the capacity of these groups to ensure they deliver for their communities and enhance their ability to advocate for their target groups as they progress along the Community Development Matrix.

3.4.1.1 Community Development Matrix

Figure 3.1: SICAP Community Development Matrix

(Sourced from SICAP Programme Requirements 2018 - 2022.)



SICAP's engagement with Local Community Groups and Social Enterprises is guided by the Community Development Matrix. The matrix, which is presented in Figure 3.1, represents the structured progression expected by LCGs as they engage with SICAP. The matrix and the work undertaken to vindicate it seeks to build the capacity of these organisations as they develop from low capacity, marginalised, and unorganised towards stronger, organised, and effective organisations able to advocate effectively for their stakeholders.

Groups are expected to pass through three stages:

- 1) Pre-development and group formation.
- 2) Capacity building and empowerment.
- 3) Strategic involvement in policy and decision-making processes at a local, regional and/or national level.

The goal of the development matrix is to ensure that LCGs and SEs become self-sustaining, avoid dependency on funding and can drive societal change, thus improving the lives of target groups in lasting ways.

Goal One Themes and Outcomes

Adapted from SICAP Project Requirements Document.

Goal One: Supporting Communities

To support communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues, developing the capacity of Local Community Groups, and creating more sustainable communities.

Thematic Area 1: Promote community engagement and stronger communities

Outcome G1 – 1:1

Needs of local communities and groups are identified, represented and integrated through local planning and service delivery.

Outcome G1 – 1:2

Local social inclusion and equality issues are addressed by LCGs.

Outcome G1 – 1:3

There is increased participation in social, cultural and civic activities among SICAP target groups due to the support of community groups.

Outcome G1 – 1:4

A strengthened sense of community.

Thematic Area 2: Build capacity of local community groups**Outcome G1 – 2:1**

LCGs progress along the community development matrix.

Outcome G1 – 2:2

LCGs have a greater capacity to address the social inclusion needs of the communities they serve or represent.

Thematic Area 3: Support participation in decision-making structures**Outcome G1 – 3:1**

SICAP target groups and community groups are represented and actively participate in decision making structures.

Thematic Area 4: Promote collaborative engagement**Outcome G1 – 4:1**

LCGs work with local service providers to develop and implement initiatives addressing social exclusion and inequality.

Outcome G1 – 4:2

Collaboration and co-operation between relevant stakeholders in addressing social exclusion and inequality is increased.

Thematic Area 5: Support social enterprises which contribute to SICAP outcomes**Outcome G1 – 5:1**

Contribute to a social enterprise sector locally and support social enterprises contributing to achieving SICAP outcomes.

Outcome G1 – 5:2

Social enterprises supported by SICAP are stronger and more able to contribute to local economic and community development.

Outcome G1 – 5:3

Social enterprises supported by SICAP provide training, volunteering and employment opportunities for SICAP target groups.

3.4.2 **Goal 2: Supporting Individuals**

Goal 2 is comprised of seven thematic areas and 17 outcomes which are the cornerstone of the SICAP individual development approach. The programme seeks to provide a human-centred and flexible approach to people's development and wellbeing. This design takes into account that, as individual needs are individual, addressing them takes a specifically tailored approach. While some engagements are one off, others can be protracted. In the latter cases, SICAP's ability to foster interagency collaboration is key and their complex barriers need to be accounted for in the design of Personal Action Plans, which lay out the supports an individual will receive to help address the challenges they face.

Table 3.2: Goal Two Themes and Outcomes

Adapted from SICAP Project Requirements Document.

Goal 2: Supporting Individuals

To support disadvantaged individuals to improve the quality of their lives through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market supports.

Thematic Area 1: Promote personal development and wellbeing

Outcome G2 – 1:1

SICAP clients have improved personal skills, wellbeing and capabilities.

Outcome G2 – 1:2

SICAP clients increase their participation in civic life, education and/or employment.

Thematic Area 2: Provide lifelong learning opportunities

Outcome G2 – 2:1

SICAP clients receive information about opportunities for lifelong learning.

Outcome G2 – 2:2

SICAP clients participate in lifelong learning.

Outcome G2 – 2:3

SICAP clients achieve higher levels of qualifications as a result of participating in lifelong learning.

Thematic Area 3: Provide preventative supports for children and young people

Outcome G2 – 3:1

Local communities and statutory stakeholders develop holistic approaches to address early school leaving.

Outcome G2 – 3:2

Children and their families are supported in education and personal development.

Outcome G2 – 3:3

Young people at risk of early school leaving remain within the education system.

Thematic Area 4: Prepare people for employment and to remain at work

Outcome G2 – 4:1

SICAP clients are better prepared to enter the labour market.

Outcome G2 – 4:2

SICAP clients are supported to remain in work through receipt of ongoing in-work supports.

Outcome G2 – 4:3

Local employers are supported to have a more inclusive approach to recruitment.

Thematic Area 5: Promote better quality and sustainable employment

Outcome G2 – 5:1

SICAP clients, the unemployed and those on low incomes, move into more sustainable and better-quality employment.

Outcome G2 – 5:2

Local employers are supported to create better quality and sustainable jobs.

Thematic Area 6: Provide a pathway to self-employment/social entrepreneurship

Outcome G2 – 6:1

Individuals are supported into self-employment (including social entrepreneurship).

Outcome G2 – 6:2

SICAP clients who have progressed into self-employment (including social entrepreneurship) are supported to ensure the sustainability of their businesses.

Thematic Area 7: Address barriers and gaps in lifelong learning in employment

Outcome G2 – 7:1

Gaps in labour market and education provision are identified and addressed through joint planning and service delivery.

Outcome G2 – 7:2

More joined-up referral systems are developed to help individuals access the right services.

3.5 Funding

Funding is available under both goals of the programme. Prior to 2020, grants of up to €1,500 for LCGs and €2,500 for social enterprises were eligible for their activities under Goal 1 and €500 per person per year to cover course fees, including registration and exam costs under Goal 2. During 2020, and because of COVID-19, grants to LCGs were increased to a maximum of €2,500 and grants to individuals were increased to a maximum of €800.

Funding can support a range of different forms of intervention as determined by the LCDC and PI subject to the needs of their Lot as determined through the Annual Review process. This flexibility allows the scheme to adapt its delivery to consider changes in the circumstances of beneficiaries. In response to the Novel Coronavirus – COVID 19 pandemic, the DRCD, LCDCs and Pobal facilitated a flexible and innovative response to the pandemic by adjusting the programmes from a model which was provided face-to-face in the vast majority of cases to an online delivery approach. Due to public health guidance limiting or restricting outright the meeting of persons, implementers devised new methods of outreach including online methods and where necessary direct interventions to bridge the digital divide.

Interventions, as intended in the policy design of SICAP, were locally tailored and driven by the need of the local community. They focused where needed on the acute problems generated by the isolation of the crisis period from out-of-hours mental healthcare to food

insecurity, and access to digital technologies and digital literacy training. This adaptive capacity of SICAP is critical to its success as it allows implementers to meet the needs of their Lot as they change rather than being held to a central policy target unsuitable for the needs of the time.

3.6 Project Monitoring

Both goals are monitored by quantitative KPIs focused on a discrete numerical measure of project performance:

KPI 1: Total Number of Local Community Groups supported.

KPI 2: Total number of individuals aged 15 and up, engaged with under SICAP on a one-to-one basis.

The targets to be achieved under each KPI are established at the Lot level between the Programme Implementor and the relevant LCDC as part of an Annual Review process. Under KPI 2 there is an additional target for engagement with a minimum number of persons who reside in disadvantaged areas as measured using the Pobal Haase Pratschke Deprivation Index for small areas. This a quantitative measure of the deprivation of an area as calculated by Pobal. This additional requirement is designed to ensure that due attention is given to those beneficiaries in areas of acute deprivation.

SICAP operates a remedy system in the event of underperformance or cost-overrun by PIs. Remedies are applied on a fix rate basis depending on the level of non-compliance. Non-compliance is measured as a percentage of underperformance of the KPI targets set in the Annual Review process, or as a percentage overspend on the project's Administration Spend Threshold which is 25% of the total Lot Budget.¹⁴

Table 3.3: Remedy Amounts

Adapted from SICAP Performance Requirements

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
% over the administrative spend threshold	1-3%	4-6%	7-9%	10% or greater
% of target not achieved	1-3%	4-6%	7-9%	10% or greater
Remedy amount	€500	€1,500	€2,500	€3,500

3.7 Challenges Facing Target Groups

Since 1997, Ireland has developed national anti-poverty strategies to provide a strategic framework in which to tackle poverty and social exclusion to improve coordination of

¹⁴ SICAP Programme Requirements (2018-2023) | Pobal

policy and promote cooperation. Over time, a range of national sectoral strategies have been developed across government departments that include social inclusion as a core objective. These strategies are discussed in the policy review presented in Section 3.8. Within this domain, SICAP has been recognised for its significant impact on reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion and equality in Ireland.¹⁵ Between 2018 and 2020, the current programme iteration had supported over 70,859 people, 4,292 LCGs and 651 social enterprises.¹⁶ In 2021, a further 26,483 individuals and 2,646 LCGs were supported. In 2021, SICAP had almost reached pre-pandemic levels of engagement with individuals.

Despite the programme's success, the COVID-19 pandemic had a considerable impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of individuals and communities in Ireland and the operationalisation of the programme itself. National evidence indicates that the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown restrictions have disproportionately affected vulnerable and marginalised individuals and communities in Ireland.¹⁷ Accordingly, the following subsections present a data-informed thematic overview of the SICAP target groups in Ireland. The aim of this section is to provide a backdrop from which the future direction of the programme can be considered and to highlight the similarities and differences in the supports needed by each group.

3.7.1 Disadvantaged Children, Families and Young People

Disadvantage for children, families, and young people can manifest in a number of forms. Children and their families can have issues ranging from membership of a disadvantaged group, lack of economic opportunities, or acute social disadvantage. For lone parents, accessing employment is a particular challenge owing to a lack of childcare or child-friendly employment opportunities while social stigma and isolation is also a challenge. For young people between the ages of 15 – 24 the work of SICAP focuses on those who are NEETs (Not in Employment, Education, and Training), at risk of dropping out of education, or those who are under-/unemployed and who need training to process into employment or formal education. All of these groups face complex issues that are often interconnected to other challenges or gaps in services where SICAP's work in interagency cooperation is essential in producing holistic solutions.

The issue of access to childcare and early childhood education can be used to illustrate the complex interconnectedness of these challenges. Access to both remains restricted due to prohibitive cost and lack of spaces in Ireland. Only 11.8% of Irish children under three avail of these services for more than 30 hours a week in contrast to an EU average of 19.5%.¹⁸ This has a direct impact on children who lose out on important early childhood development at a critical stage in their lives, which can have long lasting social and economic benefits.¹⁹ Indirectly, it also impacts upon family members who due to lacking

¹⁵ SICAP Annual Report (2020) | Pobal

¹⁶ SICAP Annual Report (2020) | Pobal

¹⁷ Implementing the Roadmap for Social Inclusion | Community Work Ireland and EAPN Ireland

¹⁸ EU Semester Report Ireland 2022 | EU Commission

¹⁹ Significant Benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through Age 27 | Schweinhart et al. 1993

a safe option for the care of their children are unable to access work opportunities that do not provide childcare. Decreased work opportunities available to (most often) women, increase barriers to reducing Ireland's chronic problems of low work intensity households (among the highest in the EU at 11.5%) and the low single parent employment gap at 64%, which is the lowest in the EU.²⁰

In combatting these issues, inter-agency collaboration is key as beneficiaries may need capacity-building supports to allow them to access further supports to place them on a pathway to economic and social inclusion. This type of long-term and sustained support is crucial to overcoming these hardest of cases. Many families, young people, or children also grapple with issues of poverty. Young people face considerable barriers and constraints in relation to poverty and are more likely to be in consistent poverty than older people.²¹ In 2018, the consistent poverty rate was 7.7% for people under the age of 18, over four times higher than the rate of 1.7% for people aged 65 and over.²²

In addition to issues of poverty among families and young people, persistently unaffordable housing and a lack of social housing provision have created a severe problem of family homelessness in Ireland. In November 2019, there were 6,696 homeless adults and 3,752 homeless children in Ireland.²³ This represents an 8.7% increase in the overall number since November 2018 and a 50% increase since November 2016. This is particularly true for those without a wider support network or who are single parents. Of the 1,685 homeless families in November 2019, 56% were single parents with children.²⁴ Recent evidence from the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice shows that the deepest income inadequacy is found in single parent households, with considerable regional disparities.²⁵

This cohort of SICAP beneficiaries face complex and persistent issues of poverty, social isolation, and economic disenfranchisement. Their needs are often complex which requires continued engagements both with SICAP and with other agencies as needed to remove barriers and build their capacity over time.

3.7.2 Disadvantaged Women

Women face particular challenges that are recognised at the core of SICAP (see Section 2.5.2). Failure to account for the particular disadvantages that women face would leave the programme unresponsive to the issues of gender inequality and sexism. In 2017, the then Department of Justice and Equality published the "National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020".²⁶ The stated aim of the Strategy is to respond to women's needs across a diversity of identities and situations. The Strategy states that a strategic approach is needed to identify remaining barriers which prevent women from achieving

²⁰ EU Semester Report Ireland 2022 | EU Commission

²¹ Ireland's UN SDGs 2019 - Report on Indicators for Goal 1 No Poverty| CSO

²² *ibid.*

²³ EU Semester Report Ireland 2020 | EU Commission

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Minimum Essential Budget Standards Publications | Justice Matters

²⁶ Department of Justice and Equality (2017). *National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020*, p7.

their full potential and from enjoying opportunities on a par with men. Specifically, it affirms:

“As opportunities and outcomes can differ for women and girls depending on their age, sexual orientation, gender identity, civil status, beliefs, ethnicity or ability, a national strategy is needed to address instances of multiple discrimination and to put forward positive action measures for women and girls who experience particular disadvantages arising from the intersection of gender with other aspects of their identity”.²⁷

Further, the Strategy notes that the diversity of women poses a challenge on outcomes such as employment, poverty, leadership, and wellbeing, which can vary widely depending on a woman’s situation. Outcomes are significantly poorer for Traveller women across a range of areas. In addition, lone parents and women with disabilities continue to have much lower rates of labour market participation.

Thus, and as noted in SICAP’s ‘Programme Requirements 2018-2023’, some women may experience cumulative disadvantage as a result of being a woman and being a member of a SICAP target group or a disadvantaged community. Moreover, the Programme Requirements highlight that:

“Women are frequently disadvantaged by policies and practices that do not recognise their different realities and experiences, such as unequal and lower pay, a greater share of care responsibilities, barriers to advancing into leadership positions, and gender-based violence”.²⁸

The Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality concluded its work in April 2021 and presented its report to the Oireachtas in June. As the National Women’s Council²⁹ have noted, the recommendations send a strong and clear signal to Government and all decision makers that the public wants women’s equality to be at the centre of our Constitution, our legislation, and our policies.

Gender equality is measured by looking at the representation of men and of women in a range of roles. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) regularly publishes "Women and Men in Ireland", a compendium of key statistics which enable us to map progress achieved towards de facto gender equality in Ireland. The 2019 iteration (the most recent) reported that more than a fifth (22.2%) of TDs in 2018 were women, the tenth lowest representation in the EU and below the EU average of 31.2%.³⁰ Furthermore, men significantly outnumbered women in all national decision-making structures in Ireland in 2018. In the 2020 general election, the proportion of female TDs did not change significantly, with 22.7% of elected TDs being female.³¹ While Ireland’s gender employment gap is small (approximately 1%) women are disproportionately represented

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Pobal (2017). *SICAP Programme Requirements (2018-2023)*, p29.

²⁹ National Women’s Council Annual Report (2021) | NWCI

³⁰ Women and Men in Ireland (2019) | CSO

³¹ *ibid.*

in low wage work or in precarious employment.³² Women in Ireland are also disproportionately likely to be homeless in contrast to their European counterparts.³³ In the Dublin region, 47% of individuals who are currently homeless are women, a figure well above the European norm, which stands at between 20% and 33% in most countries.³⁴ Women make up the majority of single parents, and consequently bear the cost of inadequate childcare provision or lack of child friendly work policies more frequently than similarly situated men.³⁵

Women need support under SICAP which recognises their circumstances and the often-cumulative disadvantage they face. Effective supports build recognition of women's different needs, expectations, and challenges into their framework providing varied and flexible approaches that work with the lives that women must lead.

3.7.3 Roma Community

Roma identity is multifaceted, and the term is an umbrella term for a collection of different ethnic groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom and Lom people). While EU institutions use the term to encompass the above communities as well as Irish Travellers, SICAP treats Roma and Irish Travellers as distinct communities on account of their separate cultures, identity, and history. While there are no official statistics on the number of Roma in Ireland, due to the methodology of the Irish Census which is not capturing specific numbers of Roma, the size of this group is estimated to be in the region of 3,000 – 5,000.³⁶ Despite difficulties in accurate statistics of Roma in Ireland, the first National Roma Needs Assessment (2018) showed:³⁷

- Approximately 20% of respondents were completely marginalised from services and supports and live in extreme poverty.
- Respondents reported children living in situations of extreme poverty and deprivation, with children being sent to school hungry and with no lunch.
- A majority of respondents reported experiences of consistent poverty, including not always having enough fuel, food or heat.
- Respondents identified barriers to accessing services including not being eligible for supports such as medical cards, training and employment schemes, homeless supports or social protection payments.

³² EU Semester Report Ireland 2022 |EU Commission

³³ Women's Homelessness in Europe | Mayock and Bretherton (2017)

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Census of Population 2016 - Profile 4 Households and Families | CSO

³⁶ Roma in Ireland | Pavee Point

³⁷ National Roma Needs Assessment | Pavee Point

- Respondents lacked documentation to prove residency, issues with language barriers, not knowing about services or how to access them, and experiences of discrimination.

In 2014, the Department of Justice and Equality assessed the effectiveness of the structures in place for consultation with and delivering better outcomes to the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. It also considered the impact of the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy that was produced by the Department in 2011. Discussions with Traveller and Roma representatives and other relevant stakeholders has resulted in a change of emphasis from integration to inclusion which, the Department notes is “better capturing what we want to achieve for these communities in our society”. The Department then established a National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy Steering Group which published the “National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021”.³⁸ In line with national policy objectives and EU best practice, the SICAP approach continues to be dynamic and tailored in its approach to engaging with the Roma community.³⁹ Evidence of the utilisation of the key success factors highlighted in the “Working with Roma: Participation and Empowerment of Local Communities” report⁴⁰ (i.e., meaningful engagement, trust, open communication and awareness of community relations) has been noted in the SICAP annual reports and provides clear support for the suitability of the SICAP approach to build the long-term trust that is needed to empower this community.⁴¹

Roma need support in accessing public services to which they are entitled, outreach to overcome isolation and stigmatisation, which isolates Roma families from seeking support, and intervention for the extreme forms of poverty in which Roma families live. The SICAP approach of providing tailored responses is well suited to build up the long-term trust needed to bridge this gap and empower this community.

3.7.4 Traveller Community

The total number of Travellers in Ireland was 30,987 according to Census 2016 (less than one per cent of the total population of Ireland).⁴² In 2017, the Economic and Social Research Institute research paper “A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland” found that Travellers stand out as a group that experiences extreme disadvantage in terms of employment, housing and health and that faces exceptionally strong level of prejudice from other communities.⁴³ Research from the ESRI and the CSO shows the following:

³⁸ National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021) | Government of Ireland

³⁹ 4 Keys to Successful Roma Inclusion | European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

⁴⁰ Working with Roma: Participation and Empowerment of Local Communities | europa.eu

⁴¹ SICAP Annual Report (2020) | Pobal

⁴² Census of Population 2016 – Profile 8 Irish Travellers, Ethnicity and Religion| CSO

⁴³ A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland | ESRI

- Travellers have much lower levels of educational attainment than the non-Traveller population, with much higher rate of school dropout, lower rates of progression to further education, and lower rates of graduation.
- Travellers have pronounced levels of unemployment in comparison to non-Travellers with the rate of traveller unemployment being 80.2% with a slightly lower labour force participation rate (57% compared to 61.4%).
- The low enrolment of Traveller children in preschools, noted by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children (2016) is of concern as Traveller children are entering primary school already at a disadvantage.⁴⁴
- Travellers have sharply worse health outcomes in older age than non-Travellers. with a Traveller being twice as likely to suffer from poor health in old age.
- Overcrowding is a persistent issue in Traveller accommodation and has not been addressed.

Moreover, “National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021” also states that the suicide rate is almost seven times higher among Traveller males than in the general population.⁴⁵

Travellers engaging with SICAP need support to help improve educational attainment and avoid school dropout. Research shows that while the unemployment rate for Travellers is still higher than similarly educated non-Travellers, higher levels of education reduce unemployment considerably.⁴⁶ In addressing this challenge, supports for Travellers to become self-employed might be particularly useful to avoid prejudice in employment decisions. Supporting Travellers with their engagement with health services is also crucial to ensure they can receive appropriate preventative care where needed to avoid worsening health in their later years. Prolonged engagements supported by SICAP and with appropriate interagency collaboration to provide a cohesive service would appear appropriate to meeting this target group’s needs.

3.7.5 New Communities

As global geopolitical instability has increased over the last few years, Ireland has welcomed new refugees and asylum seekers seeking a safe new home. According to the Asylum Information Database - Country Report for Ireland (2022), there were 2,649 asylum applications lodged in Ireland in 2021.⁴⁷ The International Protection Office (IPO) issued a total of 1,545 decisions, the vast majority of which (1,459) were positive. Among these, 868 decisions recognised international protection to the applicants, while 591 were granted humanitarian permission to remain.⁴⁸ Of the total number of applicants,

⁴⁴ Joint Committee on Education and Skills Debate (26/03/2019) | Houses of the Oireachtas

⁴⁵ National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021) | Government of Ireland

⁴⁶ A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland | ESRI

⁴⁷ Asylum Information Database - Ireland Country Report 2021 | AIDA

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

1,706 (64.40%) were men, 944 were women (35.63%) 668 were children (25.21%) and 53 were unaccompanied children (2%).

In 2020, the top three countries of origin for refugees living in Ireland were Syria (2,899), Zimbabwe (504), and Iraq (404), while for asylum-seekers were Nigeria (756), Zimbabwe (761) and Georgia (695).⁴⁹ With the recent Afghan crisis, the Irish government has assigned refugee status to 400 people coming from Afghanistan (since July 2021)⁵⁰ and as of April 2022, approximately 21,000 persons have travelled to Ireland from Ukraine since the onset of the crisis.⁵¹ Many who have fled will understandably need supports to process the circumstances they have been through and to settle effectively in their new home.

These New Communities need supports in the form of information on the services available to them, support in getting previous qualifications or education recognised, support for their physical and mental wellbeing, and assistance integrating into the wider community they are a part of. In given the complexity and severity of these needs, SICAP is well placed to deliver on these issues by providing direct supports for educational recognition and information. Programme Implementers can also function as one-stop-shops for refugees and asylum seekers providing them with connections to other services that they might need to address the complex issues they might be confronting.

3.7.6 People with Disabilities

A total of 643,131 people had a disability in Ireland; about 13.5% or 1 in 7 of the population according to the 2016 Census.⁵² Less than a third of people with disabilities were employed in 2019, with a disability employment gap of 38.6% recorded in 2020 which is one of the highest in the EU.⁵³ In 2020, people with a disability were 13.9% more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion than the general population.⁵⁴

The difference in the at-risk of poverty or social exclusion rates between persons with and without disabilities is much higher than the EU average (19.1% vs. 9.4% in the EU). Evidence shows that this is strongly linked to low work intensity for people with disabilities.⁵⁵

While disabled persons face differing levels of severity, and consequently differing levels of accommodation in order to live a full life, the evidence is clear that they need support in accessing employment as well as improvements to increase their level of social engagement with their wider communities and avoid isolation. SICAP supports tailored to the needs of each individual either seeking to improve their employment prospects or increase their level of social engagement would be appropriate. The flexible and local nature of the programme allows for such actions to be implemented for beneficiaries and

⁴⁹ Asylum Information Database - Ireland Country Report 2021 | AIDA

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Overview of the Main Changes Since the Previous Report Update | AIDA

⁵² Census of Population 2016 – Profile 9 Health, Disability and Carers | CSO

⁵³ EU Semester Report Ireland 2022| EU Commission

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ EU Semester Report Ireland 2020| EU Commission

to potentially find sustainable forms of social integration and employment that are accessible for them.

3.7.7 Economically Disadvantaged

While Ireland weathered the COVID-19 pandemic well, as the only member state not to enter recession, the issue of unemployment and underemployment affected a continued section of the population. Comparatively to EU peers, Ireland has a low number of people classified as NEETs. However, many are employed in minimum wage work which is below the level of a living wage.⁵⁶ The monthly unemployment rate for April 2022 was 4.8 % for all persons aged 15-74 years down from a revised rate of 5.1% in March 2022 and 7.5% in April 2021.

Seasonally adjusted number of persons unemployed by gender indicates that 69,300 men and 60,200 women were unemployed in April 2022, compared to 60,100 men and 46,400 women in April 2021.⁵⁷ The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for persons aged 15-24 years (youth unemployment rate) was 5.6% in April 2022 down from 7.2% in March 2022.⁵⁸

Over six in ten unemployed people in Q4 2021 were in short-term unemployment (less than one year)⁵⁹. Over the year to Q4 2021, short-term unemployment fell by 23,200 (-23.3%) to 76,500 while there was a rise of 7,500 (+20.3%) in the numbers of long-term unemployed to 44,300.⁶⁰

Long-term unemployment is a particularly serious issue due to the potential for persons who have been unemployed for an extended period to suffer lasting impacts to their self-worth, economic bargaining power, and subsequent career earnings, a phenomenon known as scarring.⁶¹ SICAP is well positioned to counteract this phenomenon through targeted intervention with individuals in the case of smaller numbers of job loss or through the implementation of a coordinated response in the event of a mass loss of jobs from a large employer ceasing trading. Through supporting retraining and educational attainment, as well as interventions to support the application process, SICAP can help ameliorate the challenge of unemployment and prevent severe economic scarring.

3.8 Situating SICAP within an Evolving Policy Context

Ireland continues to demonstrate progress in addressing issues of social inclusion. However, as recent evaluations have shown, challenges remain, and evidence indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown restrictions have disproportionately affected vulnerable and marginalised individuals and communities.

⁵⁶ EU Semester Report Ireland 2022 | EU Commission

⁵⁷ Monthly Unemployment (April 2022) | CSO

⁵⁸ Monthly Unemployment (April 2022) | CSO

⁵⁹ Labour Force Survey Quarter 4 2021 | CSO

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Is Unemployment Really Scarring? Effects of Unemployment Experiences on Wages | Arulampalam W. (2001)

Data presented in this review reveals that disadvantaged children, families, young people, women, people with disabilities and those who are economically disadvantaged or inactive are generally at a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than on average in the EU. Roma, Travellers, asylum-seekers, and refugees stand out as groups that experience extreme disadvantage in terms of housing and health and face exceptionally strong levels of prejudice. Additionally, recent crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine have demonstrated the speed at which new and disadvantaged communities can emerge and require support from SICAP in response to evolving global geopolitical landscapes.

The previous sections have highlighted the structure of the programme and the needs of the SICAP beneficiaries. The following section places SICAP within the wider policy context surrounding social inclusion. Section 3.8.1 considers the influence of the UN Sustainable Development Goals for which Ireland is a participating state. Section 3.8.2 places a specific focus on the EU Cohesion Policy and ESF+. Section 3.8.3 considers relevant policy on social inclusion and the role of the National Volunteering Strategy in promoting social inclusion. Section 3.8.4 covers specific policies which are already aligned with the existing SICAP target groups. Sections 3.8.5 to 3.8.16 consider policies related to the areas of skills development, climate change, and social enterprises.

3.8.1 UN Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.⁶² At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership to meet and overcome the pressing challenges facing humanity. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve natural environment and biodiversity.

As Ireland is one of the participating states, the SDGs and their targets must be implemented as a supranational set of frameworks on which to base future national policies and strategies. These SDGs are strongly linked to national policies and strategies and programmes. As such, they should be considered in the context of the next iteration of SICAP.

Of the 17 SDGs, there are three goals which are particularly relevant, namely:

- **Goal 1: No Poverty**
- **Goal 5: Gender Equality**
- **Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities.**

The SDGs include several targets and indicators for the development of a platform that should help with understanding and implementing the goals at national, regional, and local levels:

⁶² The 2030 Agenda |United Nations

Target 1.2: By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.⁶³

Target 1.b: Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.⁶⁴

Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.⁶⁵

Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.⁶⁶

Target 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.⁶⁷

3.8.2 EU Policy Priorities – EU Cohesion Policy

EU Cohesion Policy⁶⁸ supports the social inclusion of people with disabilities, younger and older workers, low-skilled workers, migrants and ethnic minorities such as the Roma, people who live in deprived areas, and women in the labour market as part of the policy's focus on the promotion of economic, social, and territorial convergence.⁶⁹ The EU Cohesion Policy provides funding across the member states to address regional and local imbalances and inequities through the European Regional Development Fund⁷⁰ (ERDF), the European Social Fund⁷¹ (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund⁷². The policy has been renewed for the period 2021 to 2027 with five policy objectives designed to produce a more competitive, equal, and future-proof Europe, which are articulated in Table 3.4.

⁶³ The 2030 Agenda | United Nations

⁶⁴ The 2030 Agenda | United Nations

⁶⁵ The 2030 Agenda | United Nations

⁶⁶ The 2030 Agenda | United Nations

⁶⁷ The 2030 Agenda | United Nations

⁶⁸ Cohesion Policy (2021-2027) | europa.eu

⁶⁹ EU Cohesion Policy Legislative Package (2021-2027) | europa.eu

⁷⁰ European Regional Development Fund - Regional Policy | europa.eu

⁷¹ European Social Fund Plus | europa.eu

⁷² Cohesion Fund - Regional Policy | europa.eu

Table 3.4: EU Cohesion Policy Objectives

Adapted from the EU Cohesion Policy

EU Cohesion Policy Objectives
1. A more competitive and smarter Europe
2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy
3. A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility
4. A more social and inclusive Europe
5. Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories

The EU Cohesion Policy aligns with SICAP across a number of dimensions. Firstly, the policy seeks to provide flexibility in the ability of local authorities to respond to the challenges for which they are seeking support by directing funding on the basis of local development strategies. In the new iteration of the policy, flexibility has been increased with member states having the ability to reallocate resourcing across each of the projects funds throughout the lifespan of the programme. The mid-review review process in the Cohesion Policy also allows for the dynamic allocation of a “flexibility amount” to address new challenges. This approach bears similarity to the annual review approach of SICAP where LCDC and LDC’s can amend, shape, and allocate time and resources to respond to issues as they develop locally.

The EU Cohesion Policy 2021 – 2027 goes farther than the 2014 – 2020 iteration of the policy across a number of relevant dimensions for the design of SICAP. The 2021 – 2027 iterations’ focus on flexibility and the ability for the fund to react to crisis more effectively speaks well to the design of SICAP in creating the capacity for locally placed Programme Implementers to respond to changing circumstances as they did during the period of intense lockdowns during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also has an increased focus on what is termed “Enabling Conditions” – the general and sectoral framework that ensures the effectiveness of the policies funding.⁷³ This is thematically similar to the work of SICAP in promoting interagency cooperation as it is this focus on the creation and maintenance of an efficiency seeking cooperative approach that ensures the effective use of project funds by avoiding duplication and producing synergistic supports across different agencies.

⁷³ EU Cohesion Policy Legislative Package (2021-2027) | europa.eu

In other cases, there are themes that can be brought into SICAP where appropriate to improve programme performance and alignment with best practice. The 2021 – 2027 EU Cohesion policy also seeks to reduce the burden of oversight through three mechanisms. Firstly, the rules governing the funds have been condensed into a single document, which ensures the concentration of governance. Secondly, the oversight burden for partners with a strong performance record is reduced, which empowers the performing Implementers. Finally, single audit principles are to be strengthened to reduce duplication of work in satisfying checks, which enables the streamlining of oversight.⁷⁴ Similar approaches could be brought to SICAP to reduce the burden of oversight upon Programme Implementers to allow them to concentrate their effort on the delivery of programme benefits to beneficiaries.

Finally, the programme focus on the challenge of climate change is potentially informative for SICAP given the central challenge that climate change presents and the varying impacts it will have for different social groups, particularly those who are less economically secure or who are systemically disadvantaged. While funding under the Just Transition Fund will be managed by DECC, there is a possibility for PIs to find opportunities for synergies between the two funding streams particularly in regions that are earmarked for Just Transition Funding – the Midlands. These collaborations could allow PIs to directly support their beneficiaries, particularly those who are economically insecure.

3.8.2.1 European Social Fund Plus

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the EU's main instrument for investing in people to build their capacity and support their ability to integrate, access better jobs, and improve fairness in the accessibility of employment. It follows similar goals to SICAP in seeking to promote a fairer, more equitable, and socially inclusive life for those facing social isolation and poverty. The ESF+ is an extension of the last six decades work of the European Social Fund with the goal of creating a fair and socially inclusive society by empowering member states to create and protect employment opportunities and capacity, address poverty, provide opportunities for workers to develop durable green and digital skills, and the requirement to invest in young people and address child poverty.⁷⁵ The ESF+ framework comes from the streamlining and simplification of four previous strands of social inclusion and community development funding and improving the synergies between them under a new framework. The Fund will be one of the cornerstones of EU socio-economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The European Commission has acknowledged the impact of the pandemic in terms of increasing inequality, reversing gains in labour participation and in terms of challenging

⁷⁴ EU Cohesion Policy Legislative Package (2021-2027) | [europa.eu](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-117336.jpg)

⁷⁵ European Social Fund Plus | eufunds.ie

educational and health systems. The ESF+ will be one of the key EU instruments helping Member States to address these issues.

With a budget of almost €99.3 billion for the period 2021-2027, the programme requires that member states address specific challenges in the recommendations of their national European Semester Reports (see box below) through an appropriate allocation of ESF+ share (i.e., 25% of funding addresses social inclusion, 3% (with the ambition to go to 4%) goes to addressing material deprivation, and an appropriate amount dedicated to ameliorating youth unemployment particularly among so called NEETs). Further, Ireland is required to allocate 5% of the funds to address child poverty, as the country has an above average rate of social exclusion and poverty for children. Under ESF+, member states need to support the capacity building of their social partners and civil society organisations through the allocation of ESF+ funds.⁷⁶

Summary of the European Semester Report – Ireland 2022⁷⁷

At a macro-level, Ireland weathered the COVID-19 well, being the only EU member state to avoid a recession due to the activities of multinationals within Ireland. On a number of dimensions, Ireland's recovery has been broad-based and effective: employment was able to recover quickly after the pandemic and is above the EU average; the number of people classified as NEETs fell to a record low of 9.8% in 2021%; and the gender employment gap was 1.0%, which is slightly below the EU average.

Nevertheless, a number of challenges still remain. The cost of childcare and early childhood education creates inequalities in educational attainment due to economic inequality. Only 11.8% of Irish children under three attend childcare for more than 30 hours a week, which is sharply below the EU average of 19.5%. The number of children living in households with low work intensity was still among the highest in the EU at 11.5%, despite improving from previous semester reports. The disability employment gap stood at 38.6% which was one of the highest among member states. Irish single parent households have the lowest level of employment in the EU (64%). Disabled people have a 14% higher chance of being at risk for poverty or social exclusion than the general population. Children in Ireland have an above average risk of being socially excluded or in poverty than their EU peers at 23.6%. There is an acute lack of social housing with almost 62,000 people on waiting lists, which is illustrative of an acute housing and homelessness crisis.

The fund will complement SICAP's work on the delivery of supports to its target groups, many of which are specifically referenced within the 2022 European Semester Report for Ireland as lagging behind their European counterparts. The programme was previously co-funded by the ESF PEIL as discussed in Chapter 1 and the ESF+ programme will be similarly crucial for the co-funding of this edition of SICAP.

⁷⁶ EU Cohesion Policy Legislative Package 2021-2027 | europa.eu

⁷⁷ EU Semester Report Ireland 2022 | EU Commission

3.8.3 The Roadmap for Social Inclusion, 2020 – 2025

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion is a national strategy that aims to increase the social inclusion of marginalised people. The strategy aims to reduce the national consistent poverty rate to 2% or less of the population and make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive states in the EU over the period up to 2025.⁷⁸ The strategy breaks down its ambitions through seven high level goals.

Table 3.5: Roadmap for Social Inclusion Goals

Adapted from the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025

Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Extend employment opportunities to all who can work.2. Ensure work pays.3. Provide income security for older people.4. Support families.5. Reduce poverty among people with disabilities.6. Build inclusive communities.7. Ensure that all people have access to quality services.

While addressing a wide range of priorities for SICAP, such as supporting families, reducing poverty among people with disabilities, and building inclusive communities, Section 2 of the strategy focuses on the barriers that marginalised groups are currently facing. The document places a particular importance on a people from the Travelling and Roma communities, migrant nationalities, members of the LGBTI+ community and former prisoners.

The Government commits to review the programmes already in place and to develop, as part of the public employment and further education and training service strategies, improved programmes and services aimed at increasing labour market participation and employment outcomes. The development of these services (including for example prisoner in-reach services, Traveller community outreach services, employer recruitment incentives and work-placements etc.) will form a discrete part of the forthcoming employment services strategy to replace the Pathways to Work policy.

⁷⁸ Roadmap for Social Inclusion | Government of Ireland

3.8.4 Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland, 2019–2024

The Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector sets out a long-term vision for our communities in Ireland.⁷⁹ The Strategy sets a general direction of travel for government policy in relation to community development, local development and the community and voluntary sector for the coming years. It also copper-fastens the renewed relationship and partnership between the government and the community and voluntary sector, which has developed during its preparation.

The strategy’s vision to “create vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, empowered and self-determining communities that support the social, cultural and economic well-being of all members” is informed by several shared values that have considerable alignment with the aims, goals, and themes of SICAP.

Table 3.6: Values of the Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector
Adapted from Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland, 2019–2024

Values
Value 1: Active Participation
Value 2: Collectivity
Value 3: Social Justice
Value 4: Sustainable Development
Value 5: Social Inclusion
Value 6: Human Rights, Equality and Anti-Discrimination
Value 7: Empowering Communities

The strategy aims to involve communities in decision-making, support people and organisations working with communities, develop partnership and collaborative approaches to policy and programme development and support local government to work with communities.

⁷⁹ Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities (2019-2024) | Government of Ireland

3.8.5 National Volunteering Strategy, 2021 – 2025

The National Volunteering Strategy (2021 – 2025) sets out a long-term vision for volunteering and volunteers in Ireland.⁸⁰ With actions to be implemented over five years, the Strategy sets out a general direction for government policy in relation to the volunteers and the volunteering environment. It also builds upon and strengthens the renewed relationship and partnership between Government and the voluntary sector which has developed during its preparation.

The document has been co-produced by the Government and people from community and local development, as well as voluntary, business and local government sectors. It sets out an ambitious plan to support partnership and collaborative efforts at all levels and between all stakeholders, comprising five high level objectives and 56 associated actions to support communities, their representative organisations, and the community and voluntary sector.

The National Volunteering Strategy seeks to develop and enhance the role of volunteers and encourage volunteering as a means of developing vibrant communities. It will provide the framework and the building blocks to realise this vision, through the implementation of the following strategic objectives. Section 2.3 of the strategy is particularly relevant for SICAP as it highlights the impact of Ireland's 49 LDCs in relation to community activities that are led and governed by volunteer boards and committees. The LDCs are staffed by workers funded under various government schemes and programmes that deliver community and rural development, labour market activation, social inclusion, and social enterprise services. The strategy notes that the LDCs are governed by voluntary boards operating at local level who oversee some 2,200 staff delivering €330 million of state-funded programmes. Each year, they support more than 15,000 communities and community groups and 170,000 individuals. Similarly, it notes that Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are driven by volunteers. The Strategy concludes by noting that without the commitment and engagement of the volunteers in the 31 PPNs across the country, local decision-making structures would not be influenced by the voices and input of the PPN member groups, of which there are currently 17,721.

3.8.6 Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures represents the first overarching national children's policy framework comprehending the age ranges spanning children and young people (0 – 24 years).⁸¹ It adopts a whole-of-government approach and is underpinned by

⁸⁰ National Volunteering Strategy (2021 - 2025) | Government of Ireland

⁸¹ Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014-2020) | Government of Ireland

several constituent strategies in the areas of early years, youth and participation. The framework sets out five national outcomes and six transformational goals that are intended to make Ireland one of the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Table 3.7: “Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures” Outcomes and Goals

Adapted from Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020

Outcome	Transformational Goals
1. Active and healthy, physical and mental well being.	1. Support parents.
2. Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development.	2. Earlier intervention and prevention.
3. Safe and protected from harm.	3. Listen to and involve children and young people.
4. Economic security and opportunity.	4. Ensure quality services.
5. Connected, respected and contributing to their world.	5. Strengthen transitions.
	6. Cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination.

Although social inclusion permeates throughout each of the five outcomes, it is strongly connected to outcome two. Within this context, the following Government commitments are particularly relevant.

C.2.1: Develop and implement a National Early Years Strategy for all children aged 0-6 years, covering all aspects of children’s experiences in their early years and their inclusion in Early Years care and education services.⁸²

C.2.19: In the context of the Early Years Strategy, develop a plan for the inclusion of children with a disability in mainstream pre-school and Early Years settings.⁸³

C.2.22: Strengthen social inclusion measures and re-invigorate efforts to improve educational outcomes among, and integration of, Travellers, Roma and migrant children and young people, and all those with special needs, including gifted students, recognising an enhanced role for Early Years education in targeting these groups.⁸⁴

⁸² Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014-2020) | Government of Ireland

⁸³ Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014-2020) | Government of Ireland

⁸⁴ Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014-2020) | Government of Ireland

3.8.7 The National Youth Strategy, 2015-2020

The National Youth Strategy is a whole-of-government strategy developed under the overarching national policy framework, “Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures”.⁸⁵ The strategy focuses on enhancing the contribution of current and emerging policies, programmes and services to improving the national outcomes for young people aged 10-24 years.

The aim of the National Youth Strategy is to enable all young people to realise their maximum potential, by respecting their rights and hearing their voices, while protecting and supporting them as they transition from childhood to adulthood. To achieve this aim, a number of objectives have been set in relation to each of the five national outcome areas. The following objectives are aligned with the aims of SICAP:

Objective 5: Young people, and in particular vulnerable and marginalised young people, are supported to feel safe at home, in school, in their communities and online, and are empowered to speak out when feeling unsafe or vulnerable.⁸⁶

Objective 6: Young people have safe places and spaces where they can socialise and develop.⁸⁷

Objective 7: Young people are better able to participate in the labour market through enhanced employability skills that complement formal learning and training qualifications and entrepreneurship opportunities.⁸⁸

Objective 8: Young people are a particular focus in policies that address social inclusion and poverty.⁸⁹

Objective 9: Young people are included in society, are environmentally aware, their equality and rights are upheld, their diversity celebrated, and they are empowered to be active global citizens.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ National Youth Strategy (2015- 2020) | National Youth Council of Ireland

⁸⁶ National Youth Strategy (2015- 2020) | National Youth Council of Ireland

⁸⁷ National Youth Strategy (2015- 2020) | National Youth Council of Ireland

⁸⁸ National Youth Strategy (2015- 2020) | National Youth Council of Ireland

⁸⁹ National Youth Strategy (2015- 2020) | National Youth Council of Ireland

⁹⁰ National Youth Strategy (2015- 2020) | National Youth Council of Ireland

3.8.8 **National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making, 2015-2020**

Similar to the National Youth Strategy, the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making is a whole-of-Government strategy developed under the overarching national policy framework, Better Outcomes Brighter Futures.⁹¹

The goal of the first National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making is to ensure that children and young people will have a voice in their individual and collective everyday lives across the five national outcome areas. The strategy is guided and influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The strategy focuses on the everyday lives of children and young people and the places and spaces in which they are entitled to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Accordingly, the strategy identifies the following objectives and priority areas for action.

⁹¹ National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making | Government of Ireland

Table 3.8: Objectives and Priority Areas of the Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making, 2015-2020

Adapted from National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making, 2015-2020

Objectives and priority areas
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children and young people will have a voice in decisions made in their local communities. 2. Children and young people will have a voice in decision-making in early education, schools, and the wider formal and non-formal education systems. 3. Children and young people will have a voice in decisions that affect their health and well-being, including on the health and social services delivered to them. 4. Children and young people will have a voice in the Courts and legal system.
Additional objectives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Promoting effective leadership to champion and promote participation of children and young people. 6. Development of education and training for professionals working with and on behalf of children and young people. 7. Mainstreaming the participation of children and young people in the development of policy, legislation, and research.

The following commitments are particularly aligned with SICAP.

G.14.24: Devise strategies to hear the voice of seldom-heard children in the education system in relation to their attendance, participation, and retention issues.⁹²

G.14.27: Through its consultative forum and other consultative processes, the National Council for Special Education will continue to consult with children and young people and/or their representative groups.⁹³

⁹² National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making | Government of Ireland

⁹³ National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making | Government of Ireland

G.14.28: Traveller representative groups will be required to include the voices of children and young people in their engagement with the Department of Education and Skills.⁹⁴

3.8.9 **The Migrant Integration Strategy, 2017-2020**

The Migrant Integration Strategy aims to communicate the key message that successful integration is the responsibility of Irish society as a whole and will require action by Government, public bodies, service providers, businesses, NGOs but also by local communities.⁹⁵ It seeks to encourage local communities to take action to promote integration and proposes to use networks as a means by which migrant and non-migrant groups and organisations can get to know one another and by which migrants can raise areas of concern.

The Strategy focuses on ensuring that mainstream services are responsive to the needs of the diversity of migrants. It recognises that mainstream services may need to adapt over time to ensure that migrant needs are met on the same basis as those of non-migrants. The Strategy also proposes a number of targeted initiatives including increasing migrant participation in specific areas of the economy (such as in entrepreneurship or public sector employment), targeted addressing of shortcomings in education and healthcare for migrants and solve data gaps which led to errors of omission.⁹⁶

The Strategy provides a framework for action on integration by Government and diverse sectors and organisations. It is intended to harness the benefits of integration and to address potential risks that may arise if integration is not undertaken effectively. Its vision is that migrants would be facilitated to play a full role in Irish society, that integration was acknowledged as a principle of Irish life and that Irish society and institutions work together to promote integration.

3.8.10 **The National Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2017-2021**

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy⁹⁷ (NDIS) 2017 – 2021 was launched by the Government in July 2017 to underpin the participation of disabled people in the Irish society. The strategy builds on existing policy and legislation, including the policy of

⁹⁴ National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making | Government of Ireland

⁹⁵ Migrant Integration Strategy | Government of Ireland

⁹⁶ Migrant Integration Strategy | Government of Ireland

⁹⁷ National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021) | Government of Ireland

mainstreaming public services for disabled people. The Strategy comprises the eight themes listed in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9: Key Themes of The National Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2017 – 2021
Adapted from The National Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2017 – 2021

Key Themes
— Equality and choice
— Joined up policies and public services
— Education
— Employment
— Health and wellbeing
— Person centred disability services
— Living in the community; and
— Transport and access to places

The Strategy used a coordinated and planned approach, across Government departments, to promote greater inclusion by people with disabilities in Irish society. Key foundations included the equality legislation, which outlaws discrimination against people with disabilities, among others, and the Disability Act 2005, which gives legal effect to the principle that mainstream public services should serve people with disabilities alongside other citizens.

3.8.11 **The National Strategy for Women and Girls, 2017-2020**

The National Strategy for Women and Girls⁹⁸ 2017-2020 provides the policy framework on which to ground the Government's agenda and priorities in relation to the advancement of equality for women. It represents a whole-of-government approach to improve outcomes for women, recognises the shared responsibility for achieving these results and the importance of taking measures to the maximum of available resources.

⁹⁸ National Strategy for Women and Girls (2017-2020) | Government Of Ireland

The overall goal of the Strategy is to change attitudes and practices preventing women’s and girls’ full participation in education, employment and public life at all levels, and to improve services for women and girls, with priority given to the needs of those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest outcomes. To achieve this goal, the following six high-level objectives were proposed:

Table 3.10: Objectives of The National Strategy for Women and Girls, 2017 – 2020

Adapted from The National Strategy for Women and Girls, 2017 – 2020

Objectives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advance socio-economic equality for women and girls 2. Advance the physical and mental health and wellbeing of women and girls 3. Ensure the visibility in society of women and girls, and their equal and active citizenship 4. Advance women in leadership at all levels 5. Combat violence against women 6. Embed gender equality in decision-making

The interaction between the strategy and SICAP is explicitly outlined wherein it states that SICAP will provide supports to those most in need in our communities, including disadvantaged women, Traveller and Roma women and women with disabilities, in all local authority areas throughout the country. In addition, equality is intended to be reflected within internal practices regarding employees and relationships with sub-contractors and suppliers, etc.

3.8.12 The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2016-2020

The Department of Justice and Equality published the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy⁹⁹ (NTRIS) in June 2017. The Department of Education and Skills participated in the development of the strategy and is a member of the Steering Group that was established to oversee the implementation of the new strategy. Membership of the Steering Group includes all relevant Government Departments, Agencies and NGOs.

The Strategy took a whole-of-government approach to improving the lives of Travellers and Roma in Ireland in practical and tangible ways. Departments have worked together to identify actions that can be taken to bring about a real improvement in the quality of

⁹⁹ National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy | Government of Ireland

life for Travellers and Roma. It also aimed to improve public service engagement with Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland.

The strategy comprises 149 actions covering the themes of cultural identity, education, employment and Traveller economy, children and youth, health, gender equality, anti-discrimination and equality, public services, accommodation and Traveller and Roma communities. Key education-related actions proposed in the NTRIS are included in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11: Key actions of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2016-2020

Adapted from The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2016-2020

Key education-related actions
— Traveller and Roma communities should be supported in key areas including education, employment and economic development.
— The development of education resources on Traveller and Roma culture and history for use in primary, post primary and adult education settings.
— Improved access, participation and outcomes for Travellers and Roma in education to achieve outcomes that are equal to those for the majority population.
— SOLAS and ETBs to consider the needs of disadvantaged groups including Travellers and Roma in the planning of FET provision.
— Strengthening of cooperation between formal education and non-formal learning sectors to address the high rate of early school-leaving in the Traveller and Roma communities.
— A positive culture of respect and protection for the cultural identity of Travellers and Roma across the education system.

3.8.13 The National Skills Strategy, 2025

'Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 – Ireland's Future' is designed to benefit all people living in Ireland, companies operating here or planning to establish here, those working here, and those hoping to work here.¹⁰⁰ It recognises the role that skills can play in the improvement of all and in supporting people here to grow as global citizens. Its two visions are as follows:

1. Ireland's education and training system will deliver more flexible, innovative and interdisciplinary skills.¹⁰¹
2. Public investment in education and training will be put to the best use through active employer engagement, setting clear priorities based on available resources and regularly assessing their impact and efficiency.¹⁰²

Although each of the five objectives outlined in the Strategy align with the aims of SICAP to varying degrees, the following have particular significance given the aims and ambitions of the programme.

- More people across Ireland engaging in lifelong learning.¹⁰³
- A focus on active inclusion, to support participation in education and training and the labour market.¹⁰⁴
- Constant improvement and evaluation of teaching and learning quality at all stages of education.¹⁰⁵

The Strategy outlines the importance of inclusive education as a fundamental principle of our education system. It notes that a more joined up approach to social inclusion is currently under development to support the inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and underrepresented groups within the education domain.

¹⁰⁰ Ireland's National Skills Strategy | Government of Ireland

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

3.8.14 **The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020**

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life is the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people.¹⁰⁶ The Strategy sets out a comprehensive set of targets and actions covering the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy from early childhood to the end of schooling. It will bring significant changes to areas such as teachers’ professional development, the curriculum in primary and post-primary schools, the work of school management, the way we use assessment in literacy and numeracy, how schools report to parents, boards of management and the Department of Education about student progress.

The document acknowledges that the education system alone cannot deliver better literacy and numeracy and it envisages a central role for parents and communities in supporting and encouraging children and young people to learn to use and understand literacy and numeracy in their lives. The Strategy recognises that students can fail to develop adequate literacy and numeracy skills for many reasons, some of which lie beyond the school and education system. In particular, the Strategy refers to evidence that indicates that students from socially and economically disadvantaged communities are significantly more likely to experience difficulties in literacy and numeracy for reasons associated with poverty, poorer health, and a wide range of other factors.

The strategy highlights the benefit of effective school and educational interventions to improve learning outcomes for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This strategy is focused on the actions that the education system can take to ensure that early childhood care and education and primary and second-level schools provide the best possible opportunities for young people to acquire good literacy and numeracy skills. To achieve this overarching goal, the Strategy identifies six key areas aimed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, which are outlined in Table 3.12.

Table 3.12: Key Areas of the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020

Adapted from The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 – 2020

Key Areas
— Enabling parents and communities to support children’s literacy and numeracy development.

¹⁰⁶ The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People | Government of Ireland

- Improving teachers' and early childhood education and care practitioners' professional practice through changes to both pre-service and in-service education.
- Building the capacity of school leadership to lead improvements in the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy in schools.
- Getting the content of the curriculum for literacy and numeracy right at primary and post-primary levels by making sure that the curriculum is clear about what students are expected to learn at each stage.
- Targeting available additional resources on learners with additional needs, including students from disadvantaged communities, students learning English as an additional language and students with special educational needs.
- Improving how teachers, schools and the educational system use good assessment approaches to plan the next steps for each learner and monitor progress.

3.8.15 **Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy, 2022-2023**

The Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy is Ireland's first national circular economy strategy.¹⁰⁷ This is a key addition to Government's drive to achieve a 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and to get on a path to reach net-zero emissions by no later than 2050, as per commitments in the Programme for Government and the Climate Act 2021.

The Strategy states that achieving a circular economy will be central to meeting Ireland's Climate ambitions and can deliver economic, social and environmental benefits that align with other Government priorities around employment, social inclusion and balanced regional development. Moreover, it states that scaling the circular economy will create the opportunity for significant job creation and quality work at all skills levels for the citizens of the country, leading to reduced social inequity. In addition, it presents an opportunity for financial savings and empowerment for consumers and will give a focus to inclusive, balanced, and sustainable development, particularly in terms of regional and rural development.

3.8.16 **National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland, 2019-2022**

The National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland is part of a suite of policy initiatives from the DRCD to support those who work with communities and disadvantaged groups Policy and complements the Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary

¹⁰⁷ Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy (2022 – 2023) | Government of Ireland

Sectors in Ireland, and the National Volunteering Strategy.¹⁰⁸ Taken together, this suite of initiatives will support the full range of organisations that are providing services to communities or tackling social, societal or environmental issues. The policy explicitly outlines the interaction between SICAP and SEs stating:

“As of July 2017, the Government assigned responsibility for SEs to the DRCD. The Government has also consolidated the main funding schemes which support SEs under the remit of the Department. The consolidation of the various funding streams under the remit of the DRCD is intended to ensure that, collectively, they continue to meet the Department’s objectives of supporting vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities across Ireland, through established community and voluntary provision, or through social enterprises.”¹⁰⁹

The Policy also notes the importance of SEs in achieving the objectives of the UN’s SDGs by ending poverty, protecting the natural environment, addressing inequality, and strengthening human rights in Ireland and around the world.

3.8.17 Conclusion

As indicated by the volume of relevant policies, the goals of SICAP intersect with several overarching international and national policy objectives that seek to reduce poverty and social exclusion. At a national level, SICAP overlaps with numerous policies that aim to ensure better outcomes for and inclusion of marginalised groups.

The policy context has highlighted the considerable alignment of existing policies and the SICAP target groups that creates opportunities for collaboration between Programme Implementers and other relevant agencies. Given the alignment with international and national policy objectives, it is evident that SICAP PIs can leverage additional resources in the delivery of supports to SICAP target groups.

SICAP is well placed to meet these new and evolving challenges facing its target groups. The flexible approach focused on local engagement and action can support each community in integrating into wider society on their terms while allowing Programme Implementers to work with Local Authorities, Government Departments and Agencies, and local communities to find opportunities to build cohesive supports that deal with complex cases as well as easier cases requiring lower and less protracted forms of engagement.

¹⁰⁸ National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland (2019-2022) | Government of Ireland

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

3.9 Programme Performance

3.9.1 Overview

Over the Programme's lifecycle, its key priorities have been reducing poverty, promoting social inclusion and the positive outcomes of programme beneficiaries. To date, the current iteration of the Programme has supported the following:¹¹⁰

- 4,292 LCGs;
- 70,859 individuals;
- 651 SEs;
- 34,561 individuals to participate in a lifelong learning activity;
- 34,472 people to take 51,609 course placements;
- 7,309 people to set up their own business;
- 7,051 people to be referred to other services or organisations through SICAP;
- 1,545 events;
- 1,993 activities for children and families in communities across Ireland.

Despite considerable impact from COVID-19, SICAP has continued to deliver essential supports to communities and individuals alike. Most notably, revised KPI targets for supporting LCGs and individuals were exceeded by 21% and 11% respectively in 2020.¹¹¹

The following sub-sections present an overview of the performance of the Programme within the context of Goal 1 (supporting communities) and Goal 2 (supporting individuals) and considers the extent to which the Programme has reached its goals with a particular focus on the most recent time period available – 2020 (at the time of writing).

¹¹⁰ SICAP Annual Report (2020) | Pobal (available by clicking on this [link](#))

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

3.9.2 Goal 1: Supporting Communities

3.9.2.1 Communities

As previously outlined, SICAP has supported a total of 4,292 Local Community Groups. In 2020, 2,687 groups were supported, the vast majority of which (72%) were existing groups that had already been working with SICAP. During the same time period, 744 new groups were engaged and supported. Notably, the number of new registrations in 2020 was on par with 2019, suggesting that COVID-19 did not greatly impact the engagement of new groups during the year.¹¹² New registrations on the 2020 caseload were more likely to target disadvantaged children and families (15% vs 12%) and new communities (10% vs 6%) than those already engaged with the programme.¹¹³

The primary target groups of LCGs supported by SICAP has remained consistent for the lifecycle of the current iteration. Specifically, people living in disadvantaged communities continue to have the highest representation on the caseload (46%), followed by disadvantaged children and families (13%), emerging needs (8%), new communities (7%), people with a disability (7%) and disadvantaged women (6%).¹¹⁴ On the contrary, lone parents (<1%), Roma (<1%), and Traveller (2%) continue to have low representation on the caseload.

Collaboration has been a key aspect of approach taken by LDCs over the programme lifecycle. LDCs have engaged in 1,167 collaborations with local partners, 38% (446) of which occurred 2020.¹¹⁵ In particular, 26% of the collaborations sought to meet the needs of people living in disadvantaged communities, 15% worked with disadvantaged children and families and 11% worked with new communities.¹¹⁶

Within the context of grant funding, €449,433 was allocated to LCGs in 2020 (a 134% increase compared to 2019).¹¹⁷ This significant increase was awarded in response to the increased financial burdens faced by LCGs during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., IT equipment, PPE etc). Similarly, there was a considerable increase in the number of LCGs who were awarded a grant from 273 in 2019 to 408 in 2020.¹¹⁸

Similar to previous years, small improvements were noted in the activity levels of LCGs across four key areas, namely, the proportion of LCGs involved in addressing social inclusion and equality issues (3% increase from registration to 2020); the proportion of

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

LCGs involved in collaborations with local service providers (2% increase from registration to 2020); the proportion of LCGs involved in community planning and service delivery (5% increase from registration to 2020); and the proportion of LCGs participating in decision-making structures (5% increase from registration to 2020).¹¹⁹

3.9.2.2 Social Enterprises (SEs)

To date, SICAP has supported 651 SEs.¹²⁰ In 2020, 448 SEs were supported, the majority of which (57%) were trading for five years or longer.¹²¹ In line with previous years, a high proportion (41%) of SEs were new registrations in the 2019-2020 period suggesting that SICAP was effective at reaching and supporting SEs during the pandemic.¹²²

However, small differences were observed in the type of SEs supported by SICAP in 2020 compared to previous years. For example, 30% were focused on service delivery (compared to 26% in 2018) and 22% were focused on commercial opportunities with a social dividend (compared to 19% in 2019).¹²³ In addition, it is worth noting that the proportion of SEs working to create employment opportunities has been decreasing since 2018 (20% compared to 14%).¹²⁴

Annual increases have been documented in the proportion of SEs operation in the Community Facilities/Infrastructure sector (25% in 2020 compared to 17% in 2018) and the proportion of SEs working in the Community Care and Education sector (18% in 2020 and 12% in 2018).¹²⁵ However, a decrease was noted in the context of SEs involved in the Community Enterprise sector (25% in 2020 compared to 36% in 2018).¹²⁶

Within the context of grant funding, €84,753 was allocated to SEs in 2020. 64 SEs received a grant through the programme with an average grant amount of €1,284.¹²⁷ It was noted that the vast majority (84%) of the grant funding was used for equipment and supplies, which was likely in response to demand for personal protection equipment and safety equipment due to COVID-19.¹²⁸ Compared to 2019, SICAP achieved a 20% increase on the number of SEs supported by the programme, a 35% increase in total

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

grant funding demonstrating a resilient response to the significant challenges arising from the pandemic.¹²⁹

3.9.3 Goal 2: Supporting Individuals

A total number of 70,859 individuals have been supported by SICAP in its current iteration.¹³⁰ In 2020, SICAP supported 26,178 individuals, exceeding revised targets by 11%.¹³¹ Despite this achievement, there was a reduction of 14% of individuals supported by the programme in 2020 compared to 2019.¹³² The figures highlight the significant impact of COVID-19 on the delivery and reach of the programme. Despite a fall in overall caseload numbers in 2020, SICAP has achieved a year-on-year increase in the proportion of economically inactive clients on the caseload.¹³³

Within the context of referral routes, distinct differences were noted during 2020 compared to previous years. For example, the proportion of individuals accessing SICAP via social media or publicity increased by 2% in 2020 compared to 2019.¹³⁴ However, the number of people referred to SICAP by the DSP decreased by 3% in the same time period.¹³⁵ By comparison, referrals through friends or family, other organisations and local community groups remained at similar levels.¹³⁶

Multiple barriers to social inclusion have been identified as an increasing trend among the SICAP caseload with 24% of the caseload experiencing two or more barriers in 2018, 26% in 2019 and 27% in 2020.¹³⁷ The 2020 annual report notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the various challenges and barriers experienced by individuals in communities across Ireland.¹³⁸

3.9.4 UN Public Service Award

The programme's excellent performance through the COVID-19 pandemic has received international recognition in the United Nations Public Service Awards. The programme was announced as a winner of a Public Service Award under Special Category Four: Institutional Resilience and Innovative Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic.¹³⁹ The

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ UNPSA Winner Announcement | United Nations

awards recognised the ability of public services to adapt to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic by developing innovative responses to ensure continuity of services and provision of new supports as needed. This was possible due to the work of the DRCD, programme management, and PIs to quickly identify and respond to local needs through collaboration with local communities, stakeholders, and service providers. These public health measures created new challenges in the form of access to food, pronounced social isolation, increased demand for crisis counselling, and bridging the digital divide.¹⁴⁰

The examples provided in the nomination of the programme as a testament to the innovation that is possible under SICAP when responding dynamically to challenges.¹⁴¹ From food parcel coordination, Food Hubs, the Crisis Café for out-of-hours mental health services to support for digital first at home schooling and the provision of hardware and training to bridge the digital divide, the programme was able to rapidly deliver support to new and existing beneficiaries.¹⁴² As a locally focused programme, SICAP was able to develop in line with the evolving needs of its beneficiaries.

3.9.5 Emerging 2021 Findings

It should be noted that emerging data for 2021 shows that despite the challenges of COVID-19, the SICAP targets were exceeded by the end of 2021, with a total of 2,646 Local Community Groups (LCGs) and 26,483 individuals supported. In 2021, SICAP had almost reached pre-pandemic levels of engagement with individuals. Beyond this, 501 Social Enterprises (SEs) and 35,942 children and parents were supported.

¹⁴⁰ UN Public Service award for SICAP | merrionstreet.ie

¹⁴¹ Answers to UN PSA Questionnaire | Pobal

¹⁴² SICAP Annual Report (2020) | Pobal

3.9.6 Previous Evaluations

3.9.6.1 Economic and Social Research Institute – Valuing Community Development Through SICAP 2015-2017¹⁴³

In 2019, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) completed an investigation into the value of the community development work conducted by SICAP. This work examined the previous iteration of the programme, but the findings remain valuable for appreciating the work of all actors in the programme and in designing future iterations of the programme.

At the core of the report is the challenge of evaluating community development through a quantitative approach, which is particularly important for attempts to monitor and evaluate the programme. In grappling with the challenge that there were no formal evaluations to estimate the counterfactual impact of community development policies in the academic or policy literature, the report posited that a number of factors affect the ability to scientifically measure the impact of community development:

- The dependant variable or variables are trying to capture a multidimensional outcome and in doing so trying to quantify and measure a hard to measure phenomenon.
- Treatment effects are hard to isolate as there are multiple agencies and policies in operation to affect the wellbeing of the subjects of the investigation, so isolation of effects is impossible. SICAP represented a minority of funding for its Programme Implementers and many operate with wider remits than community development.
- The fungibility of funding streams means that direct attribution of effects is hard, as it is hard to know if a specific action was funded directly by a specific funding source or another.
- Finally, and critically, there is the core problem of lacking a baseline for reference as it is impossible to identify an untreated group for a control as to do so one would need a population of similar characteristics to the treated group but who are not receiving any supports, a logistical and ethical dilemma.

However, the authors argue that the effective evaluation of community development work is possible with an alternate approach that seeks insights and measurement of change and improvement even if such change cannot be causally attributed:

- Quantitative metrics can capture useful information provided they are broad, and logically suitable for the purpose for which they are being collected. These metrics are not seeking causal inference but rather providing indicative evidence of change occurring.

¹⁴³ Valuing Community Development Through SICAP | ESRI

- Measurement of the “distance travelled” by SICAP participants in order to analyse the improvements they are making, even if direct causal attribution is not possible, can provide valuable insight into the progress being made.
- Systematic extrapolation of good practice from some PIs to inform and guide the work of others to ensure a unified approach in the area of community development.

Within this proposed response, the authors highlight additional limitations that complicate the issue of evaluation:

- There is a risk of subjectivity bias, particularly where PIs are evaluating the performance of their own work. Consequently, third-party crosschecking may be required.
- Data limitations are an acute problem for the reasons discussed above. Some metrics measure inputs but not intensity and therefore are uninformative about the progress of local community groups (LCGs) under the project.

Ultimately, the report recommended quarterly reporting, and a distance-travelled tool in order to effectively monitor the programme. This tool has been developed in the form of the ‘My Journey Distance Travelled Tool’. Further thought might be given to making it a central part of the monitoring and evaluation of the programme in the next iteration of the programme.

3.9.6.2 Economic and Social Research Institute – Evaluation of SICAP Pre-Employment Supports¹⁴⁴

A further evaluation from the ESRI in 2020 focused on the effectiveness of pre-employment supports provided to SICAP beneficiaries through the programme. The programme’s beneficiaries face multiple barriers to their activation in the labour market, including issues of motivation, confidence, or presentation. Overcoming these challenges, which need to be solved before the process of finding employment is tackled, is critical for the goal of seeing individuals’ progress into employment. Therefore, the vast majority of those who are unemployed or outside of the labour market need support that is long lasting and multifaceted.

The LDCs consulted as part of the current programme evaluation praised the holistic nature and flexibility embedded into the SICAP approach, as well as the facilitation of interagency collaboration where needed to address complex cases. The ability to collaborate helped PIs ensure that SICAP supports are directed at the most complex cases where the needs of jobseekers could be met through the use of other supports (such as the Local Employment Services or a Jobs Club).

¹⁴⁴ Evaluation of SICAP Pre-Employment Supports | ESRI

The ESRI estimated that, as a result of SICAP interventions, recipients were 18% more likely to enter employment than the control group. The effect was more pronounced with non-Irish nationals at 22% than Irish nationals at 17% within short to medium term. Increased one-to-one consultation was shown to have an approximately linear effect with a beneficiary being 6% more likely to enter employment after a single one-to-one intervention, 17% after two, and 22% for three or more. The effect was persistent even after beneficiaries left SICAP. Supplemental reviews from the latter group of recipients were positive and confirmed that they stayed in contact with the programme for further supports once they had progressed into employment.

3.9.6.3 Pobal – Good Practice for Working with NEETS under SICAP¹⁴⁵

Young people who are classified as NEETs are a key target group for SICAP. Consequently, a review into the best practice in engaging this target group was undertaken by Pobal in 2017 to provide findings and recommendations. While some issues with data quality and responder bias were noted, the project produced meaningful findings into the approach to be taken with NEETs to ensure their participation and progression with the programme:

- Engagement with NEETs was best where community outreach was used to engage with young people. Social media was useful for retention of attention but not the attraction of attention in the first place.
- Shorter taster sessions and engagement approach was useful for accessing the hardest to reach and building their interest.
- Transportation and childcare were challenges for some beneficiaries, and effective programme built solutions around this.
- Coaching is effective for those with low motivation, as was delivery of programmes in youth and community friendly environments. Given the issues some beneficiaries had within formal education, emulation of the school environment should be avoided.
- Some beneficiaries need an extra level of care and consideration due to issues with mental health, lack of existing skills, or other issues that necessitate deeper and more personal supports.
- Supports and training needs to be reflective of the workplace to improve credibility and make applicability clear, generating an environment of peer support is conducive to the effective delivery of the programme.
- Programme materials and supports need to be culturally sensitive.

¹⁴⁵ Good Practice for Working with NEETS under SICAP | Pobal

— PI teams need time, training, and organisation supports to ensure team development and to provide sufficient follow up and monitoring of performance.

In summary, the report found that more tailored approaches improved the ability of the programme to have a positive impact with young people. Approaches that worked with their circumstances, avoided isolating them or reminding them of previous negative experiences, and sought to build relationships of trust and support with the programme and their peers were effective and could contribute to the effective delivery of supports to this section of SICAP beneficiaries.

3.9.6.4 Economic and Social Research Institute – Profiling Barriers to Social Inclusion in Ireland¹⁴⁶

Using information on programme beneficiaries from 2016, research carried out by the ESRI and Pobal evaluated potential barriers to social inclusion in Ireland to illustrate the challenges faced by those who are socially excluded. The most common barrier, reported by 40% of SICAP respondents, was belonging to a jobless household followed by lone parent status, disability, homelessness or affected by housing exclusion and ethnic minority status at 12%, 7%, 4% and 4% respectively.

A multivariate analysis showed clear relationships between beneficiary characteristics and some of the barriers experienced. For example, women were 25% more likely to be single parents in comparison to males. There was evidence of age-related effects as those under 25 were 20% less likely to be lone parents or in a jobless household while people aged 56 or over were 10% more likely to report a disability than 16-24 year olds. Educational attainment was negatively associated with the barriers and difficulties faced by beneficiaries. Those educated to at least NFQ Level 5 were 10% less likely to belong to a jobless household, be a single parent, or have a disability. In relation to nationality, non-EU nationals were more likely to report barriers, particularly with regard to access to housing. The analysis also revealed that people living in urban areas were between 4% and 10% more likely to face barriers to social inclusion.

Additionally, there was evidence that PIs were allocating resources towards areas that were not classified as disadvantaged under the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, as more than two-thirds of beneficiaries came from areas not classified as disadvantaged. Thus, it was concluded, funding seemed to follow historic funding patterns rather than programme design that was meant to channel funding into areas of high deprivation.

¹⁴⁶ Profiling Barriers to Social Inclusion in Ireland | ESRI

3.9.6.5 SICAP – Consultation Findings Summary Report 2017¹⁴⁷

As part of the preparation work for the 2018 – 2023 iteration, SICAP commissioned consultation on the future of the programme. The consultations considered the view of DRCD representatives, Pobal, stakeholders from other agencies, representatives from the community and social inclusion sectors, and SICAP beneficiaries amounting to 730 people across four regional fora. The findings of this process are summarised below:

- Respondents wanted clearer definitions on concepts related to SICAP, the particular and individual role of the programme, and how the programme fits within the interdisciplinary landscape to improve communication and understanding.
- A perception of the programme was that there was a lot of duplication with other programmes and services, especially in interventions with target groups.
- There was a need to refocus the programme on the core areas of social inclusion and community development in the mind of some respondents and to clarify the roles of specific actors, and their responsibilities and the intended impact with a view to improve collaboration in place of competition.
- To improve delivery on the local level, respondents wanted increased local input to support greater levels of targeting with more accuracy to the local situation and addressing differences between urban and rural areas.
- Increased flexibility in budgets according to local needs rather than national targets was suggested as a way to improve responsiveness and innovation in response design.
- Targeting was seen as an issue, with too much focus on numerical targets and a lack of qualitative outcome-based indicators. This approach, it was argued, leads to an incentive structure that hinders innovation, as the cost of failure is too high.

3.9.6.6 Pobal – The Role of SICAP in Supporting New Communities¹⁴⁸

In 2021, Pobal conducted a learning brief into SICAP's work supporting new communities to understand the role that SICAP can play in supporting this target group's social inclusion. At about 14%, new communities made up a high proportion of SICAP clients including over 5,430 disadvantaged migrants, 1,168 asylum seekers, and 851 refugees at the reports writing. These numbers have subsequently increased because of recent

¹⁴⁷ Consultation Findings Summary Report | Pobal

¹⁴⁸ The Role of SICAP in Supporting New Communities | Pobal

geopolitical turmoil. Each sub-group under the new communities category has different socio-economic characteristics, such as employment and educational attainment, and consequently different needs from the programme. All members frequently experience multiple barriers to inclusion, connection, and integration, which may be due to existing government policy such as direct provision centres being located in areas that foster exclusion and isolation.

The report found that LDCs do good work and SICAP is aligned with the five key factors of integration as set out in national and international integration frameworks, namely employment, education, access to services, social connection, and political participation. The responses are often tailored to needs and the ability of the programme to respond flexibly is key, as it allows for a person-centred approach that responds to beneficiary needs. Many beneficiaries require prolonged engagement to overcome the issues they face and to support them appropriately. The programme's ability to foster interagency development was also highlighted as a key strength by building up strong support networks around individuals and fostering space for new communities to grow and integrate with the wider society.

The report made five high level recommendations, namely:

- Promote SICAP's role within the wider sector working with new community groups.
- Recognise that asylum seekers face specific or unique challenges and barriers to social inclusion in Ireland and develop strategies to enable SICAP to better respond to their needs.
- Identify and agree best practice approaches and develop relevant guidelines within the programme.
- Deliver capacity building to SICAP implementers.
- Reflect on resource requirements (of beneficiaries and the PIs that support them).

3.9.7 Strengths and Challenges

As with any programme of SICAP's complexity and focus on human subjects (with complex needs), there are clear programme strengths and weaknesses which can be identified through a comprehensive review of the literature. Accordingly, the following subsection will consider the identified strengths and challenges in further detail in order to identify areas that should be retained and areas that could be further enhanced in the next iteration of the programme. The section is broken down into separate strengths and weaknesses sections, each containing several thematic subheadings focused on aspects of the programme.

3.9.7.1 Strengths

Targeted Service Delivery

The programme has excellent reach and delivery through its current structure. As a national programme with locally driven implementation, SICAP can flexibly adapt to the needs of the communities it engages and deliver effective supports. This approach operated on a Lot system, with oversight of PIs by LCDCs ensuring that the programme is targeted in its application across every part of the country. Annual project reviews help support the co-design approach between LDC and LCDCs, which ensures that PIs consider the particular issues of importance to the local community in their planning. Empirically, the success of the programme is evidenced by the programme's KPIs being exceeded in every year of its current operation. During the first year of implementation, the programme exceeded its targets under goal one and two by 15% and 16% respectively.¹⁴⁹ This has continued throughout the lifespan of the project even through the disruption experienced during COVID-19 which required PIs to shift their models of support towards online methods.

Adaptability

The adaptability of the programme in response to the specific needs of clients and to the ever-changing policy landscape within which it operates has been recognised as a considerable strength in previous reviews, consultations, and assessments including SICAP's own 2020 Annual Review, previous evaluations by third parties, and in the findings of previous consultations. The definitive example of adaptability was the programme's response to COVID-19. The DRCD adapted the programme requirements to ensure greater flexibility of programme implementation, which enabled PIs further flexibility to adjust their annual plans to respond effectively to the needs of their respective communities, which had changed considerably in a short amount of time. Moreover, PIs quickly responded to the challenges posed by COVID-19 in terms of restrictions to face-to-face supports and group activities by transitioning to remote working and converting in-person courses and workshops into online versions. The programme's ability to adapt to changing circumstances is an essential part of its continued success and should be retained in future iterations, with PIs empowered to adapt as needed.

Collaboration

The ability of the programme to fund and support proactive collaboration and interagency cooperation with other relevant government stakeholders has been recognised by SICAP personnel, PIs, and external organisations as an essential driver of the programme's performance. In particular, the ESRI's 2020 report indicated that interagency

¹⁴⁹ SICAP End of Year Report (2018) | Pobal

collaboration helped SICAP contribute to holistic solutions for their beneficiaries.¹⁵⁰ Since this programme iteration began in 2018, LDCs have engaged in 1,167 collaborations with local partners, 38% (446) of which were recorded in 2020. In line with previous years, the majority (68%) of these collaborations were focused on addressing social exclusion and inequality issues. Over a quarter (26%) of the collaborations worked to meet the needs of people living in disadvantaged communities, 15% worked with disadvantaged children and families and 11% worked with new communities.

Evidently, this collaborative nature permeates throughout the programme and has taken many forms, as evidenced by the SICAP case studies conducted to share best practice, including:

- The work of Cavan County LDC in collaboration with over a dozen agencies, organisations, and public agencies to respond to the needs of their local communities during COVID-19.¹⁵¹
- Clare LDC collaborated with a number of agencies in the design and coordination of a 6-session online course targeted at asylum seekers in three direct provision centres.¹⁵²
- West Cork Development Partnership’s “Try a Trade” taster course designed and delivered in collaboration with employers and agencies provided training and employment supports to disadvantaged young people.¹⁵³

Innovative Pilot Initiatives

SICAP’s high-level and non-prescriptive design to the delivery of services helps to create an interactive and entrepreneurial approach to the delivery of the programme’s goals. PIs are encouraged to devise new approaches targeting hard to reach groups and to share these results and methods in case studies produced annually as part of the work of the SICAP Case Study Working Group.¹⁵⁴ This more experimental approach to community development and social inclusion allows for new and innovative methods to be piloted and disseminated quickly should they prove effective in achieving the goals of the programme. Encouraging the development and communication of new approaches avoids the work of the PIs from becoming ineffective by allowing them to adapt their work to incorporate new approaches from their peers, and rewards those who develop and trial new forms of outreach for their innovation. This has been supported through training efforts and the preparation of guidance material¹⁵⁵ to improve the quality of the case

¹⁵⁰ Evaluation of SICAP Pre-Employment Supports | Pobal

¹⁵¹ SICAP Case Studies (2020) | Pobal

¹⁵² SICAP Case Studies (2020) | Pobal

¹⁵³ SICAP Case Studies (2019) | Pobal

¹⁵⁴ SICAP Case Studies (2018) | Pobal

¹⁵⁵ SICAP End of Year Report (2018) | Pobal

studies.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ SICAP Annual Report (2019) | Pobal

3.9.7.2 Challenges

Monitoring and Evaluation

Please see Chapter 4.

Complexity of needs

The complexity of client needs has been reported as a key challenge for the programme delivery year-on-year.¹⁵⁷ Despite the significant impact the programme has had on reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion and equality, the composition of the SICAP caseload has continued to change both in terms of the prevalence of certain target groups within a Lots population but also in the nature of their challenges. LDCs have reported that beneficiaries' needs have become increasingly more complex and that the number of individuals requiring supports in the domain of mental health, low confidence and self-esteem, anxiety, substance abuse, addiction issues, low literacy or English language competency, and domestic violence has been increasing.¹⁵⁸

The complexity of beneficiary needs has meant that more clients engaging with the programme are not in a position to immediately avail of educational or employment opportunities and require supports in the domain of personal development and wellbeing beforehand. However, increasing delays in waiting lists for referral services and agencies (particularly mental health supports) have been reported, which consequently impact on the outcomes of SICAP beneficiaries.¹⁵⁹ As new beneficiaries have come into the programme under the new communities target group, new supports have been needed to assist them, which has necessitated the acquisition of new skills from PIs in areas such as languages to support non-native English speakers.¹⁶⁰ It has been acknowledged that some target groups (e.g., Traveller, Roma and asylum seekers) continue to be difficult to engage with due to language and cultural barriers and this presents a persistent challenge for the programme.¹⁶¹

Sustainability

Programme Implementers have expressed concerns around their ability to continue to operate the programme effectively. Given their criticality to the programme's delivery (as facilitators, coordinators, and on the ground implementers), threats to their capacity continue to pose severe challenges to the effective delivery of the programme. Pressure on their economic viability include escalating insurance and rent costs for premises, cost

¹⁵⁷ SICAP Annual Report (2020) | Pobal

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ SICAP End of Year Report (2018) | Pobal

¹⁶⁰ The Role of SICAP in Supporting New Communities | Pobal

¹⁶¹ SICAP Annual Report (2020) | Pobal

of training and upskilling staff in working with vulnerable persons.¹⁶² Additionally, PIs face difficulty in offering competitive salary and benefit terms to retain especially skilled staff, which creates knock on costs in having to rehire and train new personnel.¹⁶³ SICAP has responded by offering training and advisory supports, ICT training, technical supports, regional workshops and additional training supports to address the need for continual training and upskilling.¹⁶⁴ Further supports may be necessary to ensure that PIs are appropriately resourced across the lifespan of the programme, particularly in the face of changing macroeconomic circumstances.

3.10 Conclusion

Despite the impact of COVID-19 on SICAP, a coordinated, flexible, and responsive approach to the challenges of the pandemic allowed the programme to continue to meet the needs of beneficiaries and deliver effective interventions across their communities. The pandemic further highlighted distinct emerging trends, such as the increasing number of people accessing SICAP through online media or through advertising campaigns. SICAP adapted effectively and rapidly to changing circumstances to continue its excellent track record of delivery under both goals. This record of effective, flexible, and efficient delivery is captured in numerous previous evaluations from outside specialist evaluators and from internally commissioned and conducted studies of programme performance. SICAP continues to support local collaboration with other government agencies, local community organisations, private companies, and other relevant parties to ensure holistic responses to the needs of their beneficiaries. The development of best practice case studies and the freedom for PIs to iterate and experiment in their responses allows for continual improvement in service delivery across the SICAP community.

As with any programme engaging with human subjects, the challenges faced by the programme are constantly evolving. Beneficiaries are presenting with more complex needs and require more substantial engagement focused on building up their capacity for further inclusion efforts. Monitoring and Evaluation (MandE) will need to adapt to account for this change in the challenges confronted by PIs by properly measuring their efforts and ensuring alignment with the aims and goals of the programme. PIs may need further supports to ensure the sustainability and continuity of their operations through the lifecycle of their work as changing macroeconomic pressures drive high rates of turnover and erode the attractiveness of working on the programme. These challenges are navigable, and the programme is well placed to adapt and overcome these issues while

¹⁶² SICAP Annual Report (2019) | Pobal

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ SICAP Annual Report (2019) | Pobal

continuing to deliver at the consistently high levels it has maintained through the current iteration of the programme.

This desk review has examined a plethora of key documents relevant to the establishment and implementation of the current iteration of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. The aim of this review has been to draw insights from relevant policy, previous research, and consolidate lessons learned to inform the next iteration of the programme. Findings from this review will be used to guide primary data collection with a wide range of programme stakeholders and will contribute to a broader set of recommendations that will inform the design of the next iteration of the programme.

This review has presented an overview of SICAP with a particular focus on its aims, themes, goals, and funding mechanisms. Subsequently, a data-informed thematic commentary of the SICAP target groups was conducted to provide a backdrop from which the future direction of the programme can be considered and to highlight the similarities and differences in the supports needed by each group. Evidence highlighted in this chapter has demonstrated that despite challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and evolving geopolitical landscapes, Ireland continues to demonstrate progress in the domain of social inclusion and SICAP is well placed to address the needs of new and evolving challenges facing its target groups. Within this context, SICAP is uniquely positioned in a favourable policy domain that has considerable overlap with international and national objectives.

Similarly, the programme performance review has highlighted the unique strengths of the programme in terms of its ability to deliver and reach a wide range of target groups, adapt to evolving needs of clients and external factors such as COVID-19. In addition, the ability of the programme to facilitate and foster collaboration and experimentation has been recognised as a key strength of the programme's implementation and has resulted in international recognition in the United Nations Public Service Awards. Despite these strengths, distinct challenges have been noted that present opportunities for improvement in the next iteration of the programme. Namely, in responding to the increasingly complex needs of clients on the caseload while ensuring the sustainability of the programme in the face of difficult macroeconomic circumstances.

4 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework Review

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the process for monitoring and evaluating SICAP. It aims to highlight what is working well in measuring performance to date as well as areas where further enhancements may be beneficial. It also considers the current envisaged outcomes of the programme and how they align with the overarching aims and objectives of SICAP.

This review is informed by detailed literature reviews, stakeholder and beneficiary consultation, and thorough examination of the data collation mechanisms that inform and underpin the MandE Framework.

4.2 SICAP Monitoring Framework

SICAP monitoring is carried out through a framework that is intended to assess the extent to which the programme outcomes are being achieved. The monitoring and evaluation (MandE) framework, which is set out in Section 5 of the SICAP Programme Requirements (2018-2023), lists the strategic goals accompanied by thematic areas, outcomes, indicators, beneficiary types, and the data collection tool used for demonstrating the achievement of outcomes. Data sources are also indicated, as although most information is collected and reported by PIs, Pobal provides survey data as well.

SICAP's two strategic goals, depending on whether the primary programme beneficiaries are communities or individuals, consist of 12 thematic areas and 29 possible outcomes. Additionally, each strategic goal is evaluated by one Key Performance Indicator (KPI), which measures either the number of LCGs or individuals supported. Achievement of action outcomes must be demonstrated using the monitoring framework. In short, PIs are required to identify the relevant thematic areas and outcomes for each action in their annual plan, which are measured annually as well as cumulatively over the lifetime of the programme. Relevant indicators must also be used to demonstrate achievement of the selected action outcomes for each action as set out in the annual plan. If the SICAP work carried out relates to other outcomes, then the PI can update the action outcomes.

Several outcome reporting tools are used to facilitate the collection and documenting of information to monitor progress in achieving programme outcomes. These instruments are designed to determine the quantity and scale of the work under SICAP and assess the quality, intensity, and effectiveness of this engagement with target groups across the country.

The rest of this chapter describes the types of data that are collected and the main outcome reporting tools on which the current assessment is based.

4.3 Data Collection

The data informing the monitoring framework covers beneficiaries, interventions, outputs, and results.

4.3.1 Beneficiaries

SICAP provides supports to individuals, local community groups, social enterprises, as well as children and families. Non-caseload supports are also provided to event attendees and there is a strong focus on collaboration throughout SICAP. Registration data allow PIs to determine the profile of beneficiaries who access SICAP supports and the geographic reach of the programme.

4.3.2 Interventions

To determine the depth and breadth of engagement with target groups, SICAP 2018 – 2023 records the duration and number of distinct interventions. This data is subsequently used to assess the extent to which interventions affect the outcomes of the programme and provides a baseline for the measurement of progress or change over time as a result of SICAP interventions.

4.3.3 Outputs and Results

Programme outputs include participation in courses, progression into employment or self-employment, jobs created, referrals to other services, events, including children and family activities, and collaborative engagement. Results are collected for particular areas such as course results or if someone is still in employment/self-employment after six or twelve months.

4.3.4 Impact

The data used to measure outcomes from SICAP-funded actions come from a variety of sources and include both quantitative and qualitative elements. Impact is difficult to demonstrate, particularly when community development approaches are used. ‘Hard’ outcomes, such as assisting beneficiaries to find work or complete a lifelong learning course, can be more readily demonstrated. Such outcomes and change over time that are easier to grasp can be reported as such.

Often, however, engaging with people, communities and groups results in ‘soft’ changes or outcomes, such as achievements related to interpersonal, organisational, analytical, and personal skills, which are more difficult to measure directly and tangibly. For this reason, specific tools for collecting comparable data on ‘soft outcomes’ and ‘distance travelled’ must be used. One of the instruments developed for this purpose is My Journey, which is designed to support SICAP service users and staff to work together to identify goals and show progress over time. More details about this soft skills measurement tool are provided in the next section.

4.3.5 Outcome reporting tools

The data currently collected by Pobal under SICAP include the Integrated Reporting and Information System (IRIS), an administrative data capture system used by SICAP to record information on programme beneficiaries; My Journey, which is SICAP’s new Distance Travelled Tool that measures soft skills relevant to employment, education and training, and personal development; as well as surveys and an annual reporting system that are meant to gather more general information on SICAP delivery and local context.

Additionally, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has carried out four project evaluations of SICAP over the lifetime of the current iteration of the project. These reports have assessed the impact of SICAP pre-employment supports (Whelan et al., 2020) and the extent to which SICAP clients experience potential barriers to economic and social inclusion (McGuinness et al., 2018), as well as the goals and governance of SICAP (Darmody and Smyth, 2018) and the training provided to programme beneficiaries (McGuinness et al., 2016). These studies have been covered in detail in the literature review of the wider project review documentation (see Chapter 3).

4.3.6 IRIS

IRIS is the Integrated Reporting and Information System for the planning and monitoring of SICAP. Essentially, this tool is a customised Customer Relationship Management database developed by Pobal in 2010, adapted for SICAP in 2015, and re-designed for SICAP 2018-2023 in 2017.

All programme data is inputted and stored in the IRIS database. PIs, LCDCs, Pobal and the Department of Rural and Community Development (and other entities) have various levels of access. As work is undertaken, PIs record the profile, intervention, and output data for each beneficiary of the programme into IRIS. LCDCs monitor the PIs' progress in achieving the programme outcomes by extracting the relevant reports from IRIS for the mid-year and annual performance reviews.

The IRIS system is based on the programme monitoring framework. As a new framework will be designed as part of the new programme design, IRIS will be further adapted as part of the next iteration.

4.3.7 LCG and Social Enterprise Survey

A survey of LCGs and social enterprises that are in receipt of SICAP supports was conducted in 2019 to collect additional qualitative data relevant to programme performance that are not collected in IRIS. This survey, which focuses on increases in activity, involvement in the community, capacity to support members, capacity to advocate for members, and the economic capacity and impact of social enterprises, is intended to allow PIs to capture information about the effectiveness of the programme directly from beneficiaries.

4.3.8 My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool

My Journey was commissioned as a joint project by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and Pobal in response to LDC and LCDC feedback that a soft outcome or Distance Travelled Tool was needed to track the progress that service users make when engaging with SICAP services. The Distance Travelled Tool, which was developed and trialled over 2018/ 2019 in partnership with service providers and academic input, is designed to support service users and staff to work together to identify personal goals and to show progress over time.

Essentially, My Journey is a questionnaire suitable for anyone aged 15 years and over that can be used in individual and group settings. It is designed for repeat use to measure the change that users experience after engaging with SICAP on their way towards longer term goals such as employment and engagement with education. The questionnaire comprises 27 items grouped into four validated components (and an additional measure of general work readiness), and each item is rated by the service user using a seven point Likert scale. The five soft skill areas measured are:

1. Literacy and numeracy confidence
2. Confidence, goal setting and self-efficacy
3. Connection with others
4. Communication skills (including self-advocacy)
5. General work readiness

The insights into the self-development process of individual beneficiaries that My Journey provides can supplement data on more long-term hard outcomes that SICAP already collects on its beneficiaries. This tool is particularly beneficial for a subset of SICAP beneficiaries whose progress is best understood as improved personal capacity and/or the attainment of skills that act as the foundation for other progress to be made towards hard outcomes such as attaining employment. For example, this may be the case for individuals who are very distant from the labour market and unlikely to secure employment in the shorter term due to issues with self-confidence, lack of skills around applying for employment or interviewing, and those with underlying challenges such as literacy and numeracy deficits. My Journey supports an understanding of progress shaped by the individuals' personal progress and development towards long-term objectives, which may fail to capture small but significant steps in an individual's progress due to programme supports. As a result, My Journey could help SICAP to more accurately and fairly assess the impact of the work carried out by PIs and the net benefit provided by the programme.

Despite the delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, 762 individuals have used the Distance Travelled Tool since it was piloted in 2019. In 2021 alone, a total of 575 DTT interventions were provided by LDCs to SICAP clients. A process has also been started with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration

and Youth to establish a collaborative Distance Travelled Tool pilot project outside of SICAP in 2022. Therefore, although currently used on an optional basis by LDCs, My Journey is well placed to become a valuable data collection tool for capturing beneficiary outcomes in future iterations of SICAP.

4.3.9 Annual Reporting

Pobal produces an annual SICAP progress report series related to the overall performance of the programme, the PIs, and important developments related to the operation of the programme over the preceding year. Each annual report provides an overview of the implementation and progress of SICAP as compared to previous years. The following items are typically included in the annual report:

- An overview of the supports provided by Pobal and DRCD during the year.
- A summary of the characteristics of the beneficiaries supported, types of activities conducted, as well as outputs and outcomes achieved.
- A detailed financial report.
- National level maps of the geographical distribution of individuals and Local Community Groups (LCGs) supported by SICAP.
- A list and description of SICAP case studies produced by LDCs over the preceding year.

SICAP Annual Reports draw on data from multiple sources, including the Annual Progress Reports submitted by LDCs and their progress data recorded on the IRIS system; samples of the LDCs' case studies; and feedback from the Annual Engagement Meetings with LCDCs and LDCs over the preceding year. This review is part of the programme's performance review cycle detailing performance at a local level that covers KPIs and additional relevant information. The local level reports are reviewed by Pobal's Monitoring, Analysis, and Outcomes Unit (MAOU), whose analysis is further supported by external reports, studies, and briefings. Common themes, experiences, and trends are typically studied and expanded upon to record the programme's performance and development over the preceding year.

To date, there have been four annual review reporting cycles, with particular focus within each annual report paid to the development of services across the programme's lifespan. This was particularly relevant during the height of the

COVID-19 pandemic, when the shift to new forms of service delivery became necessary in order to abide by public health guidelines while maintaining the delivery of key services.

4.4 Defining and Assessing Community Development Work

This chapter defines the ‘community development’ approach as reflected in international understandings and Irish practices that are relevant for SICAP’s own approach to community work. Next, the limitations and progress to date in relation to SICAP’s focus on community development are summarised based on stakeholder feedback provided to the first two iterations of the programme. The chapter concludes by summarising the challenges of measuring the impact of SICAP’s community development actions. To answer calls from local organisations and project implementers who would like to see more focus on inter-agency solutions, two monitoring and evaluation methodologies are put forward as examples of tools or exercises that could complement existing tools to capture the outcomes of work tailored to local circumstances, encourage collaboration and cooperation across SICAP stakeholders, and stimulate the ability to innovate within the programme.

4.4.1 Defining Community Development

The term ‘community development’ is used to indicate both an area within the broader community and voluntary sector and a standalone discipline with its own qualifications and professional standards. In the Irish context, community development was shaped by the emergence of community action groups, development associations, and community resource centres that grew out of local responses to high levels of unemployment, educational disadvantage, poor housing, and lack of public services during the late 1970s and 1980s (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019: 41-42). The emergence of disability and Travellers’ rights organisations, as well as support groups for women and migrants as well as anti-drugs groups have consolidated the place of community work at the core of Ireland’s anti-poverty and social inclusion programmes. Nowadays, community development is recognised as a central aspect of Ireland’s social inclusion policy. This position is reflected in the government’s ‘Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland’ (2019), which serves as an implementation plan for the 2016 Framework Policy for Local and Community Development.

As a distinct approach to working for social and economic development, the 'All Ireland Standards for Community Work' defines community development as:

“[A] developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and coordinated way” (All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training, 2016: 5).

From this perspective, community development “is rooted in a broad understanding of citizenship that sees people as having a right to influence and participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their experiences and views listened to and acted on. Community development is potentially a means or process whereby people can achieve this right” (Lee 2003: 48).

Particularly relevant to SICAP given its core areas of social inclusion and community development is the collective approach that defines community work, which requires practitioners to focus on the potential benefits for communities rather than individual benefits. Moreover, the collective, empowering, and participative approaches are meant to complement each other in supporting communities to define their own priorities and agenda and actively participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Therefore, true community work should see those who are marginalised and excluded to gain in self-confidence, join with others, and participate in actions to change their situation and tackle the problems that face their community (Lee 2003: 48). Indeed, contemporary Irish success stories¹⁶⁵ that demonstrate how taking a community development approach has revitalised communities and transformed the lives of residents highlight the importance of giving people effective ownership and independence to decide what the priorities of their communities are.

The importance of empowering communities to take a stand for their rights and act in relation to their own issues is what brings about collective change and differentiates the community development approach from a charity approach in that it actively supports people to realise their rights. It is for this reason that the Government's 2019 strategy to support the community and voluntary sector promotes activities that bring communities together, empower them to identify

¹⁶⁵ See for example the six case studies included in the Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland (2019).

their own needs, priorities, and agendas, and provide them with the skills, knowledge, and experience to influence, shape and participate in decision-making processes that bring about change for the benefit of people within those communities¹⁶⁶. Indeed, these principles are supposed to underpin actions across the two SICAP goals to increase the participation of those who are the most marginalised, improve their lives, and strengthen communities.

4.4.2 Limitations of SICAP's Community Development Approach

The community development principles and the values around which the Community Work Standards are framed, namely collectivity, community empowerment, social justice and sustainable development, human rights, equality and anti-discrimination, and participation, are reflected in SICAP's three horizontal themes:

1. Promoting an **equality framework** with a particular focus on gender equality and anti-discrimination practices.
2. Applying **community development** approaches to achieve the participation of disadvantaged and marginalised communities in the wider local development context.
3. Developing **collaborative approaches** with stakeholders to improve how mainstream policies and programmes are delivered so that they impact more positively on the socially excluded.

Indeed, as detailed below, stakeholder consultations have repeatedly shown that community development is seen as a key part of SICAP. Nevertheless, consultees have also argued that SICAP's conception of community development focused more on service provision than on community development work. For example, stakeholders consulted by Crowe Horwath (2017) believed that community work was narrowly framed in terms of the number of interactions with community groups. Instead, it was argued, the programme needed to refocus on the core areas of social inclusion and community development and reduce the emphasis on activation to make room for more developmental work with communities and individuals. Among the benefits of increased community

¹⁶⁶ Department of Rural and Community Development | Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024, p.10.

development, consultees highlighted its role in identifying, developing trust, and introducing the supports available to individuals.

Similarly, interviews conducted by Darmody and Smyth (2018) with PI CEOs and workers involved in Goal 1 (strengthening local communities) revealed that community development tended to be seen as a cross-cutting theme that came down to working with community groups. To embed a broader conception of community development in the programme, it was suggested, community development should be regarded as an overarching framework that includes work with both individuals and groups. To achieve this, stakeholders advocated the adoption of a bottom-up approach to identify and address local need. New ways of documenting the variety of community development work carried out by PIs and the introduction of metrics that capture the breadth of this work were deemed necessary as well.

Stakeholder consultation on the performance of SICAP 2018-2023, which are detailed in Chapter **Error! Reference source not found.**, showed significant progress on rolling out 'true community development'. For example, the addition of qualitative data as well as the recognition of long-term intervention was highly praised. That said, as highlighted in Chapter 5, many stakeholders still believed that the outcomes and indicators associated with Goal 1 needed to reflect actual means of engaging with community needs more closely and inclusion of soft outcomes demonstrating distance travelled towards (rather than just achievement of) more long-term hard outcomes for both community groups/social enterprises and individual beneficiaries (please see Chapter 5 for further detail). Thus, overall, a more enhanced appreciation for the role of community development within SICAP was still deemed necessary.

4.4.3 Capturing Community Development Outcomes

In addition to calls to increase the programme's focus on community development, stakeholders often expressed a desire to see the performance framework and reporting mechanisms move towards capturing more soft outcomes of success that are better suited to reflect the work undertaken by PIs under SICAP (see for example LCDC and LDC assessments relevant to the monitoring focus area in sections **Error! Reference source not found.** and **REF_Ref118714290 \r \h * MERGEFORMAT Error! Reference source not found.**). In terms of community-level outcomes, current research on community development programmes, including SICAP, indicate that qualitative approaches

allow for a more systematic and in-depth analysis. To capture the true outcomes of community development interventions under SICAP, it is argued, metrics should take into account the intensity of interventions and soft outcomes, which acknowledge the fact that some groups require prolonged, intensive interventions (Whelan et al. 2019; Darmody and Smyth 2018).

As attempts to measure community development using aggregate measures community-level change make it difficult to disentangle the impact of different interventions, establishing shorter-term soft outcomes specific to SICAP group beneficiaries and interventions may be better suited to reflect changing circumstances than attempts to establish impact level change. For example, this would include capturing more accurately the extent and quality of collaboration with communities and their representative organisations and soft outcomes that track progress on the distance travelled toward hard long-term outcomes of community groups and social enterprises. Moreover, the routine collection and formalisation of best practice from SICAP through thematic reporting on work completed as part of SICAP, such as Pobal's 2021 and 2022 learning briefs, should continue to assist in providing systematic reviews of SICAP outcomes. This work should also help alleviate concerns related to the fact that bottom-up approaches to evaluate SICAP interventions are accompanied by challenges related to the subjectivity bias and differences in the quality of data collected by PIs (Whelan et al. 2019: 47).

Efforts to evaluate community development work are complicated by the goals of sponsoring programmes and challenges of causal inference (i.e., the difficulty of disentangling the effects of different programme interventions on the community under study). Although challenging, it is possible to mitigate these limitations to produce a monitoring and evaluation approach that allows SICAP stakeholders to assess the difference that the project makes in the medium- to long-term so that the supports provided to beneficiaries can be ultimately improved. The typical range of tools and methods of qualitative data collection and analysis that are currently applied to evaluate interventions, such as interviews, focus groups, observation, case studies, surveys and learning briefs, provide valuable insights into the role that SICAP plays in addressing the barriers to social inclusion experienced by members of various disadvantaged groups.

The following chapters detailing the evaluation of SICAP's monitoring framework and assessment of the data quality within the Individual Beneficiary database are

informed by consultations carried out with programme implementers, representative organisations, and other SICAP stakeholders.

4.5 SICAP Monitoring Framework 2018-2023

As noted previously, the current MandE Framework (under the existing Programme) contains the following:

- Goal 1: 5 thematic areas; 12 outcomes; 26 outcome indicators
- Goal 2: 7 thematic areas; 17 outcomes; 31 outcome indicators

Programme Implementers (PIs) are required to identify the relevant thematic areas for their actions in their annual plan, as well as which of these outcomes will be achieved for each action. Outcomes are measured annually and cumulatively over the lifetime of the programme.

4.5.1 Thematic Analysis

KPMG have undertaken a thematic analysis of all feedback gathered as part of the stakeholder consultation phase of this research. While the detailed analysis is presented in Chapter 5, specific feedback related to the MandE Framework – including suggestions for amendment in the forthcoming iteration of SICAP – is presented in the sections below.

4.5.1.1 Addressing Programme Complexity and Streamlining Processes

The majority of stakeholders consulted as part of this review (including the LDCs and Representative Organisations) pointed to the **“marked improvement”** in delivering the current iteration of the Programme in comparison to previous iterations. Thus, in large part (though not fully reflective of all views), there was a feeling that adjustments to the successor programme are required rather than a fundamental redesign. Specifically, many stakeholders (for example, see the feedback on the monitoring focus area received from Representative Organisations in Section 5.6.3) referred to the **gradual shift away from what some deemed to be “number chasing” with regard to quantitative output indicators and targets towards more soft outcome considerations**, a focus that the majority indicated they would like to see in the next iteration of the programme.

Indeed, as further elaborated in Section 4.5.1.2, consultees across stakeholder groups highlighted that the **outcomes of community development work are often multifaceted and thus difficult to measure** in any concrete manner. All consultees agreed that it can be extremely complex to understand exactly how deeply a community development approach is impacting on participants and the wider community. Thus, there was broad consensus across stakeholder groups that a more useful approach is to reemphasise the **measurement of outcomes rather than outputs** (as an example, see Section **Error! Reference source not found.**).

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) noted that Local Development Companies have found IRIS easier to use in the current programme:

“There has been some simplification (...) and people have become better at using it”.

Yet, at the same time, there was a strong feeling among LDC representatives that **some aspects of SICAP work are not sufficiently reflected by IRIS**, thus again leading to concern that sometimes “low hanging fruit” with an IRIS related output are prioritised. One of the LDC representatives stated that “what gets measured gets done”, which suggests that these measurements could arguably be seen to be leading the programme implementation rather than measuring it. Similarly, some Representative Organisations consultees noted that **reaching targets seemed to be “more important” than aiming for quality community development work**. One representative noted that:

“Demand for reaching targets sometimes outstrips the reality of community development side of the work.”

Consequently, it was argued, the current review of SICAP should seek to address perceptions that output targets **indirectly incentivise the pursuit of what has been referred to as ‘low hanging fruit’** rather than encourage sustainable, quality community development work. For example, while current metrics monitor the number of individuals and activities, some LDC and Representative Organisations consultees asserted, improvements could be made to capture the varying levels and intensity of programme activities and interactions. Intensity measures can relate to the resources allocated to interventions in terms of either time or cost (or both).

Some Representative Organisations consultees also referred to the potential difficulty communities and individuals may have in navigating the plethora of funding streams and state entities involved in supporting the citizen on the frontline in Ireland. A sense of fragmentation can be experienced, as one participant noted that “What is complex does not need to be complicated”. Ultimately, there was a feeling among consultees across stakeholder groups that **the impact of these various programmes** (i.e., measurable changes that have taken place as a result of the supports) **may be more challenging to understand or measure at a national level** if it is difficult to understand “where” benefits are coming from. It is also notable that analysis undertaken by Darmody and Smyth (2018) found that approximately half of PIs received a fifth or less of their funding through SICAP and only one-tenth received at least half of their funding through SICAP. Thus, it is **difficult to discern distinct causal impacts of any one policy or programme**. There was related concern that in some cases **SICAP could be seen to be “competing” with other programmes** to reach output targets.

Furthermore, some consultees (including those in Community Development Organisations) felt that **many of the current programme wider community outcomes are difficult to measure in practice** and there was **debate as to whether SICAP could be reasonably expected to wholly contribute to the achievement of such outcomes**. One example cited was outcome G1-1:4 “A Strengthened sense of community”. These types of outcomes can be very difficult to measure, consultees noted, particularly given that other national, regional, and local projects can potentially lead to the same impact.

Overall, there was broad consensus across the stakeholder groups consulted that the current MandE Framework is **“unnecessarily complex” and would benefit from further simplification and streamlining**. As such, consultees recommended a **clearer, more distinct focus for SICAP**, which should be reflected in its monitoring and evaluation framework. **The programme’s focus, many stakeholders felt, should include social inclusion and community development** and less emphasis on labour market activation alone. This recommendation is further discussed in Section 4.5.1.2. Moreover, some consultees suggested that the focus on community development should align with the guiding framework set out in the “All Ireland Standards for Community Work” (2016).

4.5.1.2 Further Embedding Community Development

SICAP represents a core component of Ireland’s community development strategy, led by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). As mentioned previously, the All Ireland Standards for Community Work define community development as “a developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way” (All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training, 2016: 5). The Standards were developed in the context of **increasing professionalisation of the sector**, which involves the development of professional standards across a range of disciplines and professions including youth work, social work and teaching at primary, secondary and further education levels.

The increasing “professionalisation” of the sector in recent years was an element discussed by consultees across stakeholder groups over the course of this research. Yet, at the same time, there was a widespread feeling that the **current iteration of SICAP does not place enough value on quality community development work**, despite broad acknowledgement that the current iteration of programme has “done better” to reflect community development work than previous iterations. While it was recognised that SICAP is underpinned by community development principles, many consultees felt that the **concept must further “underpin” SICAP as a whole and should be better reflected in the way the programme is monitored.**

Indeed, the first two iterations of SICAP have been criticised for adopting a relatively narrow conception of community development. For example, stakeholders consulted by Crowe Horwath (2017) believed that **community work was narrowly framed in terms of the number of interactions with community groups**. Instead, it was argued, the programme needed to refocus on the core areas of social inclusion and community development and reduce the emphasis on activation to make room for more developmental work with communities and individuals.

The **inherently complex, long-term nature of quality community development work** was also discussed in depth over the course of the consultation undertaken as part of this review. In particular, it was noted that

SICAP currently places an emphasis on facilitating LCGs' progression along the community development matrix, which comprises four stages:

- Stage 1: Pre-development and group formation.
- Stage 2: Capacity-building and empowerment.
- Stage 3: Collective action.
- Stage 4: Strategic involvement in policy and decision-making processes at a local, regional and/or national level.

Moreover, one interviewee from a Community Development Organisation (see Section 5.7.1) stated:

“We need to review the SICAP concept of Community Development. It's a linear progression in SICAP, this rarely happens in real life.”

Another Community Development Organisation consultee affirmed that:

“Different community groups require different amounts of time and resources. Thus, the quantity of community groups engaged with is not an appropriate metric. You can inadvertently incentivise low hanging fruits this way.”

Thus, there was a strong perception that the **principles of community development are not sufficiently 'translating' into an effective monitoring framework that can capture the outcomes of community level interventions.** To address this concern, many consultees (including from Representative Organisations) highlighted the importance of soft outcomes that allow for assessments of incremental progress towards long-term hard outcomes. As previously stated, the use of “intensity measures”, where ‘intensity’ can relate to the resources allocated to interventions in terms of either time or cost (or both), may also be helpful in this regard.

Moreover, many consultees across stakeholder groups expressed their dissatisfaction with financial remedies attached to KPIs (see for example the feedback provided by Community Development Organisations in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**). Representatives of Community Development Organisations also indicated that cash penalties are viewed as a “shaming

exercise rather than the financial ramifications” and “ruins relationships with LCDCs and LDCs”.

4.5.1.3 Enhancing Understanding of Individual and Community Needs

Many of the Representative Organisations consulted highlighted their view that SICAP could be **more effective in supporting individuals and groups to identify their needs and address key issues** and “in particular support disadvantaged groups to know and avail of their rights under national strategies and international and national human rights standards”.

Many of these consultees also affirmed that the next iteration of SICAP should **acknowledge that a predominant focus on getting people into full time jobs is not always the most appropriate pathway for an individual**. For example, for those who are unemployed, the duration of unemployment is a key issue impacting social exclusion. Indeed, the long-term unemployed are significantly more disadvantaged and distanced from the labour market. Consultees highlighted that the currently increasing “in work poverty” often particularly impacts women who have caring duties and are more likely to be in low paid and part-time work. Moreover, someone with caring duties but who is outside of the formal labour market is often referred to as being part of a “jobless household”, which has “very negative connotations”, according to some representative organisations. Often, caring duties involve significant work that is simply not paid.

Thus, a **renewed emphasis on allowing people to progress to a point where they can meaningfully participate in SICAP and progress towards long-term outcomes** is deemed a more suitable focus (through improved wellbeing, confidence, soft skill development etc). However, critically, consultees highlighted **the need for more formalised collection of individual motivations for engaging with SICAP**, so that progress can be assessed according to the individuals’ own needs and preferences rather than hard long-term outcomes such as “getting a job” that, as highlighted previously, is not always an appropriate metric for progress.

Many consultees across stakeholder groups noted that **an understanding around how supports and activities are used in achieving individual goals or programme outcomes is important**. For example, one consultee within a Representative Organisation highlighted baking cakes as an activity that had been pursued in one instance and queried what goal that activity intends to

advance. Thus, it is critical to capture the outcomes of activities, not just the activities themselves.

4.5.1.4 Empowering Communities to Represent Their Needs

In 2019, the Government published “Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities – A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024”, which states that:

“We support communities, in all their diversity, to build a shared understanding of their own needs and aspirations. We support enhancing and resourcing participative and local democracy that affords community members the opportunity to participate in, and influence, the decisions that affect their communities.”

This idea of a **participative approach to understanding, identifying, addressing, and representing needs** is also highlighted in the All Ireland Standards for Community Work (p22), which notes that a participative approach involves promoting the rights of communities to:

- “Be supported to establish and develop autonomous, participative groups and networks to promote and advance their rights.
- Be consulted, involved, and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes that affect their lives.
- Be supported to gain the confidence and skills to articulate and represent their needs in an effective and inclusive manner.”

Many consultees across stakeholder groups felt that SICAP does not currently sufficiently support their communities to identify and respond to their needs. One issue repeatedly mentioned was a **lack of representation within key decision-making structures**. One Representative Organisation consultee stated that:

“I am not aware of any development company with a minority representative on their board from any target group, same with LCDC. There are serious hoops to get through to be represented on the LCDC.”

Thus, consultees pointed to the need for a real participatory process, which should ensure that national representative organisations are involved in identifying needs and then setting associated targets or indicators.

At the same time, other consultees noted that some LCGs have no strong desire to become representatives for a wider community. Rather, they are more focused on providing enhanced “quality of life” mechanisms for people. Thus, there is “**no one size fits all**” approach and **motivations must be captured from the outset** so that progress can be measured in a meaningful way.

Consultees among Representative Organisations also queried how changes at individual level should be aggregated to show group or population-level outcomes and underlined the need for a better measure to capture this link. **Specifically, it was felt that enhanced local demographic data is required** (as also highlighted in Chapter 5) to demonstrate if and/or the extent to which how people are doing better at a local level over time. One consultee stated that SICAP needs “to not just count activity or representation but real population change”. Yet, it is also important to acknowledge the potential limitations involved in such an approach given the wider funding landscape. Indeed, as highlighted earlier, it is difficult to attribute change to any one individual programme, including SICAP.

Moreover, a sizeable majority of LCDC consultees and significant minority of Community Development Organisation consultees commented on the benefit of enhanced flexibility that was brought about as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian crisis. Specifically, it was affirmed that enhanced flexibility ensured that local and emerging needs could be addressed almost instantaneously. The ability to respond quickly to unanticipated or sudden crisis events (including economic uncertainty or downturns) is deemed critical in ensuring the long-term sustainability or resilience of the programme.

Consultees across stakeholder groups also highlighted the need to explore an **expanded definition of capacity building for communities** that can be meaningfully translated into measurable inputs and outputs (for example, see Sections **Error! Reference source not found.**, 5.4.1.4, 5.6.1.1, and **Error! Reference source not found.**). This recommendation also implies a shift in emphasis away from service delivery and a **reemphasised focus on partnership and collaboration**. Current programme reporting requirements are perceived as a barrier to this goal of enhanced collaboration, as there is no meaningful way of capturing valuable activities that seek to find innovative ways of engaging with or empowering communities. These exercises, consultees noted, are a lengthy and time consuming, but absolutely critical, part of quality community development work. Indeed, **quality community development work**

requires building strong relationships and trust with communities (which can, in many cases, take longer than the duration of a SICAP iteration).

Another important item raised by representatives of LCDCs and community development organisations is the role of staff retention and training in ensuring quality community development can be delivered. **Outcomes will not be achieved without key delivery vehicles in place**, many asserted. Some participants noted that LDCs are facing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff because the terms of employment and career development opportunities they can offer within SICAP are “less attractive than those in public service employment, for example HSE, Tusla, Local Authorities and the Education and Training Boards”. Enhanced ongoing opportunities and capacity building for staff were proposed by LCDC and Community Development Organisation consultees in the next iteration of SICAP in order to address staff retention concerns. Representative Organisations recommended that proposals should include cultural and anti-racism training, as well as training on data collection on key target groups, which was deemed critical to meeting equality objectives, to ensure that staff can effectively engage and empower communities and ensure positive experiences for beneficiaries from the start.

4.5.1.5 Capturing the “Journey” – Assessing and Redefining Progress

As highlighted in Section 4.5.1.2 (and expanded later in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**), consultees across stakeholder groups asserted that **beneficiary progress cannot and should not be framed in a narrow way**.

Many consultees across stakeholder groups highlighted that, as Ireland is at near full employment, people who are furthest from the labour market typically require a lot more intensive support. This should be perceived as **a journey at individual level** where often **more holistic, wraparound supports are required**. Overall, SICAP is currently seen as setting targets that require a significant throughput of individuals. This view, it is argued, does not align with the reality of certain individuals or groups who often require a more intensive level of engagement.

Indeed, the purpose of the “My Journey: the Distance Travelled Tool” (DTT) is to understand individuals’ progress towards an outcome such as employment relative to their own baseline starting point. The benefit of a distance travelled approach is that it **recognises that while hard outcomes are useful (e.g., course completion), they do not capture the nuance of progression for individuals who are facing more significant disadvantage** and may achieve

numerous important soft outcomes on a more long-term journey towards hard outcomes such as labour market activation.

The Distance Travelled Tool (DTT) measures the following five soft skill areas:

1. Literacy and numeracy confidence
2. Confidence, goal setting and self-efficacy
3. Communication skills
4. Connection with others
5. General work readiness

Notably, the DTT remains an optional tool and is not used to measure outcomes at national level. Nevertheless, throughout the consultation process, consultees across stakeholder groups highlighted the **need to monitor soft outcomes within SICAP**, such as improved self-perception, behavioural changes, and improvement of soft skills and competences, be they basic or life skills, employability, or professional skills. However, it is acknowledged that **such changes are not straightforward to define or measure**. A Distance Travelled type Tool or process could be used for LCGs as well.

4.5.1.6 Exploring Evolving Spatial Dynamics

There was a strong feeling across all stakeholder groups that evolving spatial dynamics are not appropriately reflected in the current iteration of the programme. Discussions around spatial dynamics repeatedly focused on the utility of the Deprived Area Target and the impact of shifting conceptualisations of urban and rural areas and differing disadvantage across these areas. Specifically, the intended use of the Deprivation Index (DI) was questioned and referenced as having been “the source of longstanding debate”. Within the context of changing spatial dynamics, one LCDC representative stated:

“The way the deprivation figures are recorded are more like the old areas of social disadvantage. Disadvantage is now seen across the county.”

Consultees among LCDCs and Community Development Organisations proposed that the Deprived Area Target should be removed from the next iteration of the programme and the intended use of the DI should be

reconsidered. Several factors have been highlighted as justifications for the removal of the Deprived Area Target, which include:

- The Housing Assistance Programme (HAP);
- The use of hotels and guest houses for direct provision;
- Homeless hubs; and
- Rural disadvantage.

However, as detailed in Sections **Error! Reference source not found.** and REF_Ref118727831 \r \h * MERGEFORMAT **Error! Reference source not found.**, many consultees across LCDs and community development organisations have recognised the utility of the data and agree that it should still be available from IRIS. However, setting a percentage target, without other metrics that could complement it, is not regarded as helpful. Similarly, a number of stakeholders noted that data stemming from the DI is routinely used to inform decision making about resource allocation.

4.5.1.7 Encouraging the Development of Strong Social Enterprises

Enhanced focus on Social Enterprise (SE) development was regarded as a positive aspect of the current iteration of the programme. However, several areas for improvement were suggested throughout stakeholder consultations (see Section **Error! Reference source not found.** for detailed findings) to ensure that S Es can **effectively leverage their unique position**, including sheltered job opportunities, work placements, and training for SICAP target groups.

The primary advantage of SEs was seen as creating opportunities for those most excluded from the labour market. However, recognising the importance of this role is not perceived to be reflected at state level. Consultees suggested that a perception shift is required to ensure that the role of SEs as community groups is supported. One consultee noted that SEs are defined by the state as private, for-profit entities with a social objective. However, **acknowledgment of the contribution of SEs in achieving social objectives could be improved.**

A small number of LCG/SE consultees noted that SEs are not just meeting needs in the community, rather, they are providing a range of opportunities in the community for those most excluded from the labour market. Within this domain, **enhanced awareness of the facilitatory role of SEs** (in terms of providing

social entrepreneurship, job opportunities, training, and volunteering opportunities for SICAP beneficiaries) is required. To recognise and support these contributions, additional investment and support for SEs to catalyse development will be essential.

As noted in Section 4.5.1.1, **several stakeholders groups pointed out that some aspects of SICAP work are not sufficiently reflected by IRIS.** Specifically, concern has been raised around the **recording of SEs' work in IRIS**, which was not deemed to capture fully the nature or amount of support they require.

Another important point to note is the consultees' widespread belief that SEs are uniquely positioned to support entrepreneurs to create a lasting social impact on the community and economy. Moreover, it was noted that **SEs are ideally placed to align with climate change action.** A consultee from a Representative Organisation highlighted one exemplar of SE best practice, which provides a mattress collection and recycling service in the Connaught/Ulster region. This SE has contributed to greener and more inclusive communities by employing members of the Traveller community.

Although SEs provide distinct opportunities to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment, consultees commented on the importance of appropriate funding and support to ensure the long-term success of SEs (see Section **Error! Reference source not found.** for more details).

4.5.1.8 Further embedding inclusivity in labour market activation processes

Discussion on approaches to tackling labour market barriers, addressing unemployment, and stimulating active citizenship focused on the nuanced relationship between SICAP beneficiaries, local employers, and the wider community. From the perspective of SICAP beneficiaries, the **discussion focused on the importance of pre-development supports to effectively position individuals to benefit from supports and opportunities.** Several consultees noted the importance of pre-development supports that are currently offered through SICAP. However, **a small number of individual beneficiaries consulted highlighted opportunities for enhanced pre-development supports** with one consultee stating:

“A preparation workshop for going back to college should be brought into it.”

From the perspective of local employers, many LDC consultees commented on **the distinct approaches and strategies that are used to engage with local employers to support a more inclusive approach to recruitment**. Within this context, LDCs noted that they:

“Build relationships with employers to broker any challenges”.

LDCs also commented on **the importance of engaging with local employers to facilitate bespoke employee courses (in conjunction with local employers) and on-site visits to local employer premises to demonstrate the applicability of the skills they develop through SICAP supports**. The importance of this “relationship building” is further discussed in Section 3.2.9 and provides additional evidence for the opportunity to enhance data capturing on **relationship building endeavours** that are regarded as essential components of SICAP.

Taken together, **enhanced pre-development supports in conjunction with improved data capturing and knowledge sharing of relationship building endeavours would be welcomed**. In the next iteration of the programme, this undertaking would address market barriers and help bridge the gap between individuals who are eager to join the labour market and employers who require support and guidance to ensure an inclusive approach to recruitment. Ultimately, these approaches will contribute to more inclusive and sustainable communities.

4.5.1.9 Enhancing Collaboration

The discussion around collaboration focused on the relationship between:

- Different LDCs;
- LDCs and LCDCs; and
- LDCs, LCDCs and government departments/ agencies.

Regarding LDC collaboration, a broad range of **unique and innovative targeting strategies aimed at “hard to reach” target groups emerged throughout consultation**. However, at present, monitoring, evaluation, and dissemination of such strategies is generally conducted through case study reporting. However, consultees alluded to the fact that **enhanced formal mechanisms through which emerging strategies can be shared would be beneficial**.

Alternatively, **LDC and LCDC collaboration was viewed by consultees as a critical component to achieving a healthy working relation and overcoming administrative difficulties of service provision.** As further detailed in Chapter 5 (particularly Sections **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.**), many LCDC and LDC consultees suggest that more clearly defined responsibilities and objectives could result in enhanced collaboration between LDCs and LCDCs. LDC representatives suggested that a “lack of trust” can be experienced at times between LDCs and LCDCs, which likely hinders this working relationship. As such, enhanced effort to outline roles and responsibilities of LDCs and LCDCs will result in improved collaboration between the two key stakeholders.

Within the context of LDC/LCDC and Government department/agency collaboration, **enhanced opportunities for multi-agency collaboration were noted by many of their representatives.** One consultee encapsulated the perception of the role of SICAP in terms of its contribution to multi-agency collaboration.

“Without SICAP, many large-scale, multi-agency collaborations would not be possible. These collaborations range from programmes that LDCs leverage to enhance the range of supports they provide, to participating on interagency fora that often rely on SICAP to connect them to the target group they need to reach.”

LDC CEOs / nominated representatives also suggested that an overemphasis is often placed on the issuing programme or agency when a support is provided to a beneficiary (more details are provided in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**). Within this context, several consultees expressed a need for a reduced focus on issuing programmes/agencies.

“The service user needs help and LDCs are there to provide help. This overfocus on the issuing programme [SICAP] is not important to the service user.”

Moreover, as a small number of departments were seen as “working in silo”, consultees recommended that **enhanced efforts should be made to ensure integrated service provision.** One consultee noted that the HSE and other departments could potentially benefit from greater synergies through SICAP.

Taken together, it is clear that **collaboration is regarded as a key driver and unique dimension of SICAP**. The consensus around this point clearly demonstrated that the collaborative spirit of the programme should be continued and enhanced (where possible) in the next iteration. However, monitoring and evaluation of effective collaborative endeavours could be improved through the facilitation of a formal knowledge sharing mechanism. To do so, increased efforts would be advised to **reduce knowledge silos** and to enhance the evidence base for innovation – in turn enhancing impacts for beneficiaries.

4.5.1.10 Early Years Investment

Increased consideration of the interplay between children/young people and their families was discussed by members of representative organisations as a key targeting approach with a substantial impact on SICAP target groups (see Section **Error! Reference source not found.** for more details). Within this context, international evidence was cited showing that interventions targeted at children and young people have a **significant impact on lifelong outcomes**. Moreover, a revision of timelines was recommended so as to place a longer-term emphasis on planning and outcome expectation. Supporting this claim, one consultee stated:

“In order to be sufficient, we have to be thinking about the people who will be coming through the door ten years from now.”

4.6 Enhancing Data Collation and Analysis

This section provides an assessment of the data currently collated to inform the monitoring and evaluation of SICAP.

4.6.1 Individual Beneficiary Registration Form Review

A signed registration form is included in the individual beneficiary file that must be kept for each individual registered with SICAP. The purpose of this form is to collect information to establish eligibility for the programme, to know more about the people who are engaging with SICAP, and to ensure that a tailored service can be delivered. This section reviews the structure and applicability of the questions set out in the registration form and provides high level commentary on key topics and questions. Overall, it is proposed that the questions included on the form should gather the appropriate information for SICAP to identify and classify individuals into the designated target groups, without asking for unnecessary information.

The division of the form into six sections provides a clear structure for the information being requested and enables SICAP to inform participants on the rationale behind the information being requested and its intended use. Additionally, the requested information aligns with a variety of CSO variables, which facilitates the analysis of this data in conjunction with the latest Census data. This analysis could be undertaken from national level down to local areas due to the nature of the data collected by SICAP (individual/point level) and the multi-level aggregate data from the CSO (small area level through to national level statistics).

The primary concern with the form, and by extension with the SICAP database, is the variable 'Requested but not provided'. Given the sensitive nature of some of the questions in the form, there will always be some level of 'non-response'. As such, there needs to be an understanding of the level of 'non-response' within the SICAP database and the potential issues with gaps in the data. A high rate (over 5%) of 'non-response' data points within the SICAP database could impact the overall quality of data, with potential issues growing proportionate to the 'non-response rate'. Overall, this data quality issue could impact the effectiveness of SICAP, as there is potential for target groups, or specific sub-sets of these groups, to be missed or incorrectly provided for.

One of the primary concerns regarding the form is related to the terminology or wording of certain questions, where there is a level of ambiguity for specific terms that could lead to poor response rate or misinterpretation. A brief discussion of these terms is presented below.

'Target Group/Background' (Section 5)

It is difficult to ascertain if the question around "Disadvantaged Women" is adding to the overall capturing of data, as a 'Disadvantaged Woman' is going to fall into another one of the target groups such as 'Lone Parent'. The use of the word 'Disadvantaged' may require further consideration here and whether this category has a clear definition in either quantitative or qualitative terms.

It should also be noted that some respondents from representative organisations have highlighted that "Having disadvantaged women as a separate category is a barrier to capturing multi-layered and intersectional disadvantage so commonly affecting women". Moreover, it was stated that the 'disadvantaged women' category is problematic, as it "means women have to explain their disadvantage or be labelled as such".

'Is Transport a Barrier'? (Section 6)

This question raises a query as to what the intended interpretation of the term 'barrier' is. 'Barriers' could be referred to or interpreted in several ways. For example, it may be a physical barrier in terms of a disability that prevents the use of public transport or driving

a car, an economic barrier in terms of affording to take public transport or buying a car, a general barrier in terms of a lack of infrastructure, or a health-based barrier that has emerged after the COVID-19 pandemic for people who are immunocompromised and are unwilling/unable to take transport as it poses a risk to their health.

4.6.2 Individual Beneficiary Database Review

SICAP provided an anonymised extract of their individual beneficiary database (DB) to KPMG Future Analytics to facilitate an independent review of the variables and the quality of the data held within. The data provided was anonymised in accordance with GDPR policies. All personal identifying data was excluded from the dataset prepared for KPMG, as set out below:

- First and Last name
- Address lines 1-4
- Email
- Home Phone
- Mobile Phone
- ID number

Location data (Lot, County/Dublin Postcode) was provided for each record.

A holistic review of the database was undertaken, with a focus on the ‘non-response rate’ within the data in the first instance. For this analysis it was deemed that variables with a non-response rate greater than 5% have the potential for a negative impact on the quality of assessment or reports produced by SICAP on their respective topics and required more detailed review. Additionally, variables with a non-response rate greater than 10% would be subject to more rigorous analysis, as they are much more likely to negatively impact findings. For context, the individual beneficiary database contains approximately 95,000 records. Thus, a 5% non-response rate is indicative of about 4,800 persons, while a 10% non-response rate is indicative of 9,500 persons. Table 4.1 summarises that link between the response rate and quality of the data analysis.

Table 4.1: Quality of Variable based on Response Rate

Response Rate	Data Quality Note
>95%	High level of reliability, with minimal potential for negative reporting impacts
94-90%	Reliable but requires appropriate caveats when used in reporting
<90%	Somewhat reliable but requires additional due diligence and appropriate caveats when used in reporting

A deeper exploration of several variables was also carried out to examine whether non-responses are linked to any particular variables (for example, whether non-responses to

'transport barrier' are linked to age, location, disability etc.) The focal points of this analysis were age and location (Lot and county). This approach enabled the review of data through additional cross tabulation of key topics (disability, nationality, ethnic/cultural background etc.) in conjunction with age and location-based variables. The results of this analysis are reported at both county and Lot¹⁶⁷ level. Table 4.2 outlines the data that has been supplied by variable name and non-response rate. Detailed descriptions of each variable are set out in the respective sub-sections.

Table 4.2: Individual Beneficiary DB variables, SICAP 2022

Variable Name	Non-response rate
Lot	N/A
PI	N/A
Date_of_registration	N/A
Disadvantaged_woman	0.0%
Highest_educational_attainment_at_registration	0.0%
Principal_economic_status_at_registration	0.0%
How_did_you_hear_about_SICAP (excluded from report)	1.5%
Age_band	0.0%
Emerging_needs_group	0.0%
HP_deprivation_index	1.2%
Foreign_background	4.4%
Transport_barrier	8.7%
Homeless_or_housing_exclusion	9.4%
Ethnic_cultural_background	9.7%
Jobless_household	6.1%
Lone_parent	8.0%
Person_with_a_disability	14.8%
Low_income_worker_household	1.5%
Gender	0.0%
Nationality	0.8%
New_communities	2.7%
New_communities_group	0.0%
County_DublinPostcode	N/A

The non-response rate varies dramatically across variables and exceeds 5% in six cases. Particular attention has been given to the 'disability', 'lone parent' and 'transport barrier' variables due to both their non-response rates and the particular sensitivity and

¹⁶⁷ Spatial area of 'Lots' can be seen on the POBAL map viewer: <https://maps.pobal.ie/WebApps/DeprivationIndices/index.html>

impact of these variables. However, the sensitivity of the disability-related question in particular needs to be borne in mind. In some instances, non-response may mean that the person in question did not give consent to this information being recorded. Therefore, further disaggregation of non-responses into either 'did not consent' and 'did not provide' would provide further clarity on potential gaps in the data.

Section 4.6.3 provides an evaluation of each variable included in **Table** Table 4.2, which consists of:

- Data quality review and commentary.
- CSO alignment/comparison to national level demographic statistics, where applicable.
- Data and/or cross-tabulated insight.
- Initial recommendations.

and publicly available CSO data, these variables could only be reviewed based on national level demographic statistics rather than at more localised levels or granular data. Comparison to the national average is not ideal, as the different dynamics in operation within the target group and potential divergence from national statistics are difficult to know. For example, understanding the baseline profile for specific target groups would require a special tabulation request to the CSO for direct comparison with the SICAP data, which could take the form of a full socio-economic profile (age, educational attainment, employment levels, disability rates etc.) for the Traveller or Roma population, at both national level and aggregated to Lot level. This analysis would establish the baseline for that specific group and the specified geographies (national, county or Lot level) and allow SICAP to understand the level of participation based on their individual beneficiary database. Subsequently, this analysis could be used to identify participation shortfalls or potential engagement opportunities.

4.6.3 Variable Review and Analysis

This section contains the database variable sub-sections, while the definitions below are for variables that do not have dedicated sub-sections.

Lot: These are 51 geographic areas of operation designated by local authorities. Each Lot is operated by one of the 46 Programme Implementers.

PI: 46 Programme Implementers (PIs) are the local development companies contracted to implement SICAP. Some Programme Implementers operate in more than one Lot.

County_DublinPostcode: This is the county or Dublin postcode linked to the individual's address. This field is mandatory and is populated when the individual's address is confirmed by AutoAddress.

How did you hear about SICAP: Information about how individuals learned about SICAP, whether from family or friends or from another agency or service. A category is selected if the individual provides this information.

4.6.3.1 Disadvantaged Women

Variable Definition: This target group recognises the gendered nature of women's roles in society. It can only be selected for women experiencing disadvantage who do not belong to any other programme target group. 'Yes'/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information (only relevant if the gender is 'Female').

Table 4.3: 'Disadvantaged Women' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
NA	93,674	98.77%
Yes	587	0.62%
No	577	0.61%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable contains too high a proportion of 'NA' records to perform meaningful analysis.

4.6.3.2 Highest Educational Attainment at Registration

Variable Definition: The highest level (NFQ) of education achieved by the individual at the time of registration with SICAP. Education attainment level is mandatory and is self-declared by the individual.

Table 4.4: 'Educational Attainment' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
No formal education	1,404	1.48%
Primary (NFQ 1 or 2)	6,039	6.37%
Lower secondary (NFQ 3)	18,760	19.78%
Upper Secondary (NFQ 4 or 5)	26,172	27.60%
Technical or Vocational (NFQ 4-5)	5,138	5.42%
Advanced Certificate / Completed apprenticeship (NFQ 6)	8,605	9.07%
Higher Certificate (NFQ 6)	7,613	8.03%
Ordinary Bachelor Degree/National Diploma (NFQ 7)	8,097	8.54%
Honours Bachelor Degree/Professional Qualification (NFQ 8)	7,871	8.30%

Postgraduate Diploma or Degree (NFQ 9)	4,869	5.13%
Doctorate (NFQ 10)	270	0.28%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

There is a 100% response rate to this question, therefore there is no issue with the quality of this variable. Furthermore, this question aligns with the CSO Census variable on the same topic, which allows for direct comparison with CSO data and the various levels of geography that Census data is aggregated to (small area, electoral division, local authority, county, and national), and therefore alignment with SICAP Lots.

Table 4.5: Comparison of National Education Profile (2016) to SICAP DB, SICAP 2022

Responses	National	SICAP
No formal education	1.69%	1.48%
Primary (NFQ 1 or 2)	10.79%	6.37%
Lower secondary (NFQ 3)	14.52%	19.78%
Upper Secondary (NFQ 4 or 5)	18.52%	27.60%
Technical or Vocational (NFQ 4-5)	8.77%	5.42%
Advanced Certificate / Completed apprenticeship (NFQ 6)	5.89%	9.07%
Higher Certificate (NFQ 6)	4.95%	8.03%
Ordinary Bachelor Degree/National Diploma (NFQ 7)	7.66%	8.54%
Honours Bachelor Degree/Professional Qualification (NFQ 8)	10.70%	8.30%
Postgraduate Diploma or Degree (NFQ 9)	9.17%	5.13%
Doctorate (NFQ 10)	0.93%	0.28%
Not Stated	6.41%	-
Grand Total	100.00%	100.00%

The data provided in Table 4.5 shows a divergence between the national educational attainment profile and that of SICAP participants, with a 61% of participants having an educational attainment of NFQ 5 or lower, compared to 54% in at national scale. Higher levels of educational attainment correlate positively with improved employment prospects and subsequently higher economic wellbeing due to workers being able to attract a higher wage premium for more exclusive skills. Due to SICAP's focus on those experiencing social disadvantage, the concentration of individuals with lower levels of educational attainment within the SICAP beneficiary pool is to be expected given their lower economic status, which heightens social isolation.

While the educational attainment variable can be compared directly to Census data, it would be vastly more valuable if baselines for each target group could be established through special tab request(s) to the CSO so that more meaningful insights at a 'target group' level could be obtained.

4.6.3.3 Principal Economic Status at registration

Variable Definition: The employment status (unemployed, employed or economically inactive) of the individual at the time of registration with SICAP. Provision of the economic status data is mandatory and self-declared by the individual.

Table 4.6: 'Economic Status' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
01. Employed – State supported employment scheme	7,968	8.40%
02. Employed – Part Time	7,349	7.75%
03. Employed – Full Time	2,974	3.14%
04. Employed – Self Employed	2,218	2.34%
05. Unemployed – Up to 1 year	9,656	10.18%
05. Unemployed up to 6 months	11,378	12.00%
06. Unemployed more than 6 months (7-12 months)	5,829	6.15%
07. Unemployed 13 - 24 months	8,504	8.97%
08. Unemployed more than 2 years	18,513	19.52%
09. Economically Inactive	20,446	21.56%
Employed	3	0.00%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

With a 100% response rate to this question, there is no issue with the quality of this variable. The aggregated version of this data (e.g., into employed, unemployed and economically inactive) allows for comparison with Census data. Furthermore, alignment with the CSO Census variable on the same topic would allow for a direct comparison to the CSO data and the various levels of geography that Census data is aggregated to (Small Area, Electoral Division, Local Authority, County, and National), and therefore alignment with SICAP Lots. Given the remit of SICAP, it is expected that there is massive divergence from national level employment statistics.

Figure 4.1: Comparison of Principal Economic Status - Census 2016 to SICAP 2022

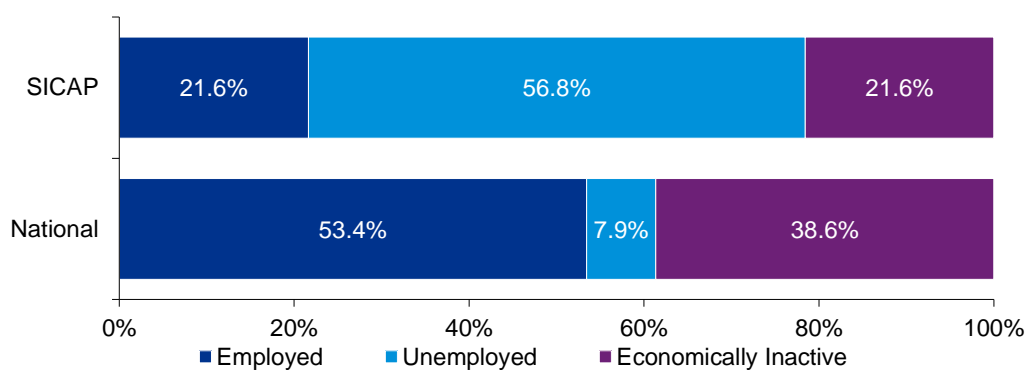


Figure 4.1 indicates that nearly 57% of SICAP participants are classified as unemployed, which is far higher than the 2016 national statistics but also a clear indicator of the targeted participation approach that the programme takes. Comparison to the live register data, or other similar data, could also be used to inform SICAP on their inclusion rate based on current employment levels.

4.6.3.4 Age Band

Variable Definition: Age band (e.g., 15-24 years) of the individual at the time of registration with SICAP. Age band is mandatory and is determined by the date of birth (if provided), otherwise it is self-declared by the individual.

Table 4.7: Age Band variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
15-24	16,626	17.53%
25-35	22,775	24.01%
36-45	24,562	25.90%
46-54	16,703	17.61%
55-65	10,891	11.48%
Over 65	3,281	3.46%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

There is a 100% response rate to this question, therefore there is no issue with the quality of this variable. Furthermore, this question aligns closely with the CSO Census variable, with a 1-year deviation in some bands, thus allowing for comparison at the various levels of geography that Census data is aggregated to (small area, electoral division, local authority, county, and national), and therefore, facilitating alignment with SICAP Lots.

Figure 4.2: Comparison of Age Bands - Census 2016 to SICAP 2022

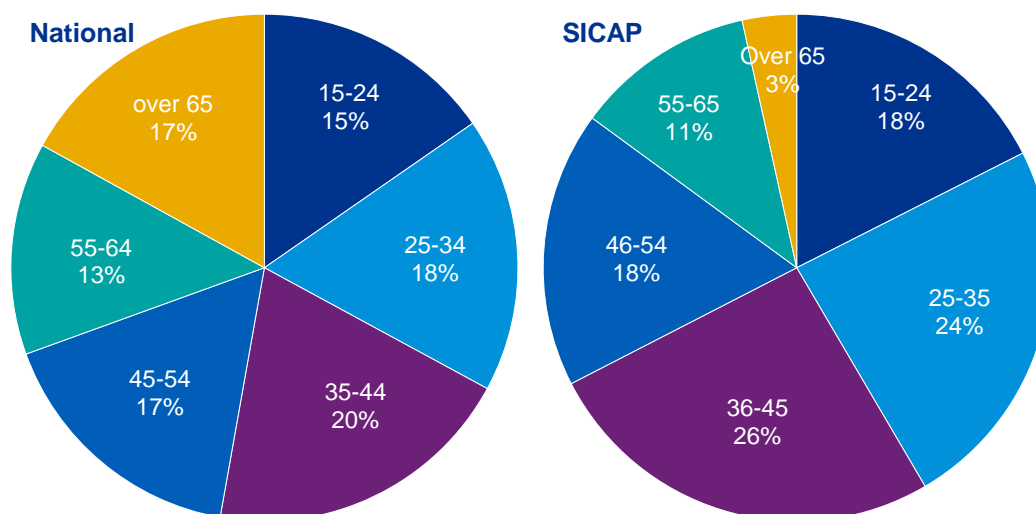


Figure 4.2 indicates some differences in the age distribution of SICAP participants compared to the national profile, with the largest deviation in the older age cohorts. While nationally 17% of the population is aged 65 years and over, only 3% of SICAP participants are over 65. However, note that older people, or those aged over 65, are not a target group within SICAP. Yet, it should be noted that some stakeholders consulted with as part of this research, such as the ILDN, feel that older people should be considered as a target group within the next iteration of the programme (more details provided in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**).

This data is another example of a variable that can be compared directly to Census data but would be vastly more valuable if baselines for each target group could be established through special tab request(s) to the CSO to derive more meaningful insights at a 'target group' level.

4.6.3.5 Emerging Needs Group

Variable Definition: A new target group that the LCDC wishes to see particular engagement within their Lot area(s) (e.g., substance misusers, older people or disadvantaged men). A category is selected if the individual provides this information. Only relevant if the LCDC has identified an emerging needs group.

This variable contains 57 separate categories, with temporal disaggregation/groupings for several categories, with 94.5% of records classified as 'NA'. Examples of these categories are as follows: '(2018-2022) The Homeless'; '(2019/2020) LGBTI Community'; '(2020/2021) LGBTI Community', and '(2021) Unemployed youth'. The

volume of categories within this variable, in conjunction with the 'NA' rate, rendered the variable ineligible for meaningful analysis.

4.6.3.6 HP Deprivation Index

Variable Definition: This field determines if the individual belongs to the 'People living in Disadvantaged Communities' target group. Their address is confirmed by AutoAddress, mapped to a small area and linked to the Pobal HP deprivation index. Disadvantaged communities are defined as living in a geographical area that is categorised as disadvantaged, very disadvantaged, or extremely disadvantaged.

Table 4.8: Deprivation Index variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
Extremely Affluent	21	0.02%
Very Affluent	589	0.62%
Affluent	7,351	7.75%
Marginally Above Average	25,421	26.80%
Marginally Below Average	32,702	34.48%
Disadvantaged	20,216	21.32%
Very Disadvantaged	6,837	7.21%
Extremely Disadvantaged	266	0.28%
Homeless	253	0.27%
Roadside	4	0.00%
Unofficial halting site	6	0.01%
Not mapped	1,172	1.24%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

As this variable has a 99% response rate, there is no issue with the coverage of this data.

4.6.3.7 Foreign Background

Variable Definition: Individuals whose (both) parents were born outside the island of Ireland. 'Yes'/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information.

Table 4.9: Foreign Background variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
No	36,307	38.28%
Not Requested	42,766	45.09%
Requested but not provided	4,130	4.35%

Yes	11,635	12.27%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable has a massive proportion of 'Not requested' records (45%) in addition to 4% non-response rate. Given this combination of fields, the variable is of poor quality and should not be relied upon. That said, it should be noted that 99.9% of the 'Not Requested' records are from the first two years of the programme (2018-2019), after which this issue effectively disappears. Therefore, poor data quality is a consequence of requirement changes during the life of the programme. As the variable is only applicable to 55% of the programme lifespan, its reliability and reporting effectiveness can only be relied upon after from 2020 onwards.

4.6.3.8 *Transport Barrier

Variable Definition: This is one of the six social inclusion barriers and provides information on whether access to transport (public or private) is a barrier for the individual's participation in or access to services or employment etc. 'Yes'/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information.

Table 4.10: Transport Barrier variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
No	64,693	68.21%
Requested but not provided	8,231	8.68%
Yes	21,914	23.11%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable has a 91% response rate, which is above the 5% benchmark set out for this assessment but within the upper 10% limit. The variable does not align directly with any Census question, thus limiting the comparison to contextual CSO data. Furthermore, the lack of specificity hampers its use as a standalone indicator in analysis and reporting. However, the variable does become more useful when used in cross tabulation with other variables to investigate the underlying dynamics of those facing a transportation barrier(s), thus enabling the identification of potential causes to the transportation barrier.

The assessment of county level participation and non-response rate for this variable has found that the proportion of 'Requested but not provided' records ranges between 27% and 0.3%. A cross tab assessment by age band has found a non-response rate of 8-9% for the 15-54 age cohorts, which increases to 10-15% for the older cohorts (55-64 and over 65). While the increase in non-response rate is noteworthy, the distribution of programme participants across the age bands should also be taken into account, as older cohorts (55+) constitute just 15% of programme participants. Table 4.11 shows that

the combined total for 'Requested but not provided' records for 55-64 and Over 65 age bands is 1,550, which is just marginally higher than the total for the 15-24 age band.

Table 4.11: Transport Barrier by Age Band, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of parent row	% Of DB
15-24	16,626	17.53%	17.53%
No	8,924	53.67%	9.41%
Requested but not provided	1,383	8.32%	1.46%
Yes	6,319	38.01%	6.66%
25-35	22,775	24.01%	24.01%
No	15,205	66.76%	16.03%
Requested but not provided	1,804	7.92%	1.90%
Yes	5,766	25.32%	6.08%
36-45	24,562	25.90%	25.90%
No	17,810	72.51%	18.78%
Requested but not provided	2,089	8.51%	2.20%
Yes	4,663	18.98%	4.92%
46-54	16,703	17.61%	17.61%
No	12,419	74.35%	13.09%
Requested but not provided	1,405	8.41%	1.48%
Yes	2,879	17.24%	3.04%
55-65	10,891	11.48%	11.48%
No	8,128	74.63%	8.57%
Requested but not provided	1,044	9.59%	1.10%
Yes	1,719	15.78%	1.81%
Over 65	3,281	3.46%	3.46%
No	2,207	67.27%	2.33%
Requested but not provided	506	15.42%	0.53%
Yes	568	17.31%	0.60%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%	100.00%

Recommendations:

A follow-up question should be added for those who answer 'Yes' to this question to identify the root cause for the barrier. An example of such a question could be "What is the primary reason for your transportation barrier?", with potential answer variants including "Disability (inability to drive)", "No access to private transport", and "No access to public transport".

A review of Lots with high proportion of 'Requested but not provided' records is also recommended to identify the root cause of the issue.

4.6.3.9 * Homeless or Housing Exclusion

Variable Definition: Individuals who are defined as homeless or affected by housing exclusion according to national definitions. This is one of the six social inclusion barriers. 'Yes'/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information.

Table 4.12: 'Homeless or Housing Exclusion' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
No	79,478	83.80%
Requested but not provided	8,882	9.37%
Yes	6,478	6.83%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable has a 91% response rate, which is above the 5% benchmark set out for this assessment but within the upper 10% limit. The variable does not align directly with any Census question, thus limiting the comparison to contextual CSO data, but comparison to other dataset dedicated to homelessness can be used to rationalise the SICAP data to the evolving homelessness environment across the country. The assessment of county level participation and non-response rate has found that the proportion of 'Requested but not provided' records for this variable ranges between 35% and 0.5%.

Table 4.13: Homelessness by Age Band, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of parent row	% Of full DB
15-24	16,626	17.53%	17.53%
No	13,969	84.02%	14.73%
Requested but not provided	1,493	8.98%	1.57%
Yes	1,164	7.00%	1.23%
25-35	22,775	24.01%	24.01%
No	18,799	82.54%	19.82%
Requested but not provided	1,862	8.18%	1.96%
Yes	2,114	9.28%	2.23%
36-45	24,562	25.90%	25.90%
No	20,435	83.20%	21.55%
Requested but not provided	2,307	9.39%	2.43%
Yes	1,820	7.41%	1.92%
46-54	16,703	17.61%	17.61%

No	14,300	85.61%	15.08%
Requested but not provided	1,529	9.15%	1.61%
Yes	874	5.23%	0.92%
55-65	10,891	11.48%	11.48%
No	9,325	85.62%	9.83%
Requested but not provided	1,167	10.72%	1.23%
Yes	399	3.66%	0.42%
Over 65	3,281	3.46%	3.46%
No	2,650	80.77%	2.79%
Requested but not provided	524	15.97%	0.55%
Yes	107	3.26%	0.11%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%	100.00%

The analysis of the non-response rate by age bands has found that the non-response rate is stable across all main age cohorts (15-54) of the database (8-9%), while higher levels are noted in the older age groups 55+ (11-16%). Once again it should be noted that this older age group equate to less than 2% of all programme participants.

4.6.3.10 * Ethnic/Cultural Background

Variable Definition: Individuals belonging to distinct groups that share the same culture and distinct identity (e.g., history and language). This variable considers the origins that a person descends from and includes two programme target groups: Travellers and Roma. Membership of an ethnic minority (which includes Travellers and Roma) is one of the six social inclusion barriers. This information is considered sensitive data and is only collected for individuals who provide explicit consent in the data consent form. A category is selected if the individual provides this information. The sensitive nature of this question is likely to contribute to a higher rate of 'non-response' compared to other, less sensitive, questions.

Table 4.14: Ethnic/Cultural Background variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
01.White - Irish	62,769	66.19%
02.White - Irish Traveller	2,065	2.18%
03.White - Any Other White Background	12,215	12.88%
04.Black or Black Irish - African	3,821	4.03%
05.Black or Black Irish - Any Other Black Background	540	0.57%
06.Asian or Asian Irish - Chinese	318	0.34%
07.Asian or Asian Irish - Any Other Asian Background	1,938	2.04%
08.Roma	478	0.50%

Other, including mixed background	1,512	1.59%
Requested but not provided	9,182	9.68%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable has a 90% response rate, which is above the 5% benchmark set out for this assessment but just within the upper 10% limit. Therefore, inaccuracies may arise when using this variable due to the high non-response rate. This question aligns with the CSO Census 2016 variable on the same topic, which allows for direct comparison with CSO data and the various geography levels it is aggregated to (small area, electoral division, local authority, county, and national) and therefore alignment with SICAP Lots.

Figure 4.3: Comparison of National Ethnicity Profile to SICAP Database

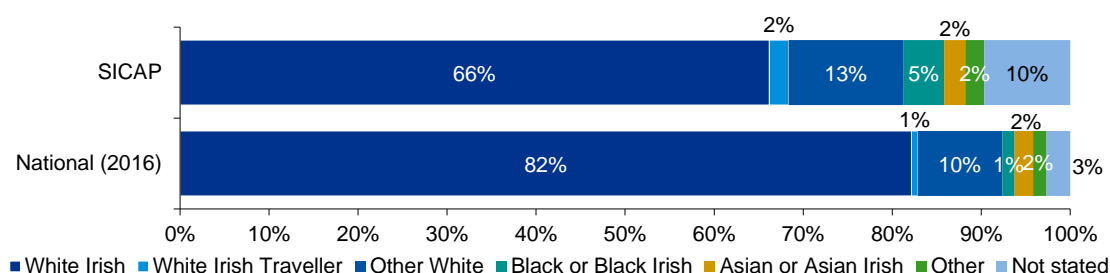


Figure 4.3 shows significant divergence from the national ethnic profile within the SICAP database, with a lower proportion of 'White Irish' population and more numerous ethnic minorities. It should also be noted that the non-response rate (10%) is higher than the Census 'Not Stated' value (3%). The assessment of county level participation and non-response rate has found that the proportion of 'Requested but not provided' records for this variable ranges between 32% and 1.3%.

The analysis of this variable in conjunction with age bands has found that the non-response rate is consistent across the 15-64 age cohorts (about 9.5%) with an increase to 16% in the 'Over 65' age band. In terms of absolute figures, the non-responses in the 'over 65' age band represent 0.5% of overall records, or approximately 500 participants.

Additionally, a cross tab analysis of this variable and 'nationality' has found that 52.4% of 'Requested but not provided' records stated their nationality as 'Irish', while less than 1% were classified as 'Requested but not provided' for both variables. The low proportion of crossover in non-response to both the 'Ethnic/Cultural Background' and 'Nationality' indicates no direct correlation between non-responses to these variables (i.e., a person not answering one question does not determine their response to the other).

As mentioned earlier, consent to provide this information was required and has an impact on the non-response rate, as 'did not consent to provide' and 'consented but did not provide' are aggregated into 'Requested but not provided' records. Further analysis of

the 'Requested but not provided' records and separation of participants who consented to the sensitive questions from those who did not consent would lead to the identification of the true 'non-response' rate for this variable.

4.6.3.11 * Jobless Household

Variable Definition: Individuals living in a household with no members in employment. This is one of the six social inclusion barriers. 'Yes'/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information (only relevant for those who are unemployed or economically inactive at registration).

Table 4.15: Jobless Household variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
No	49,520	52.22%
Requested but not provided	5,794	6.11%
Yes	39,524	41.68%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable has a 94% response rate, which is above the 5% non-response rate benchmark set out for this assessment but within the upper 10% limit. The assessment of county level participation and non-response rate has found that the proportion of 'Requested but not provided' records for this variable ranges between 26% and 0.1%.

The variable does not align directly with any Census question, thus limiting the direct comparison to contextual CSO data. Nevertheless, it is possible to use other census variables, such as 'principal economic status', as a proxy. This variable has the potential to add value to Lot level socio-economic profiles when compared to other employment or income-based metrics.

Table 4.16: Jobless Households by Age Band, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of parent row	% Of full DB
15-24	16,626	17.53%	17.53%
No	9,312	56.01%	9.82%
Requested but not provided	1,190	7.16%	1.25%
Yes	6,124	36.83%	6.46%
25-35	22,775	24.01%	24.01%
No	11,857	52.06%	12.50%
Requested but not provided	1,249	5.48%	1.32%
Yes	9,669	42.45%	10.20%
36-45	24,562	25.90%	25.90%

No	12,871	52.40%	13.57%
Requested but not provided	1,347	5.48%	1.42%
Yes	10,344	42.11%	10.91%
46-54	16,703	17.61%	17.61%
No	8,827	52.85%	9.31%
Requested but not provided	848	5.08%	0.89%
Yes	7,028	42.08%	7.41%
55-65	10,891	11.48%	11.48%
No	5,801	53.26%	6.12%
Requested but not provided	665	6.11%	0.70%
Yes	4,425	40.63%	4.67%
Over 65	3,281	3.46%	3.46%
No	852	25.97%	0.90%
Requested but not provided	495	15.09%	0.52%
Yes	1,934	58.95%	2.04%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%	100.00%

A cross tab assessment of this variable by age bands has found that across the 15-54 age cohorts there is a non-response rate of 5-7% while the over 65 age band has an increased non-response rate of 15%.

4.6.3.12 * Lone Parent

Variable Definition: This target group covers individuals living in a single adult household and raising dependent children and/or young people on their own. A lone parent may be a single parent or someone who is separated, divorced, or widowed. Lone parent is one of the six social inclusion barriers. Yes/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information.

Table 4.17: 'Lone Parent' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
No	75,058	79.14%
Requested but not provided	7,559	7.97%
Yes	12,221	12.89%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable has a 94% response rate, which is above the 5% non-response rate benchmark set out for this assessment but within the upper 10% limit. The assessment of county level participation and non-response rate has found that the proportion of 'Requested but not provided' records for this variable ranges between 29% and 0.8%.

This question aligns with the CSO census variable on 'Type of Household¹⁶⁸', which details households based on the relationship of occupants (i.e., 'Married couple', 'Married couple with children', 'One Parent Family with children' etc.). Therefore, direct comparisons can be made with CSO data and the various levels of geography that census data is aggregated to (small area, electoral division, local authority, county, and national), ensuring alignment with SICAP Lots.

While census 2016 results indicate that, nationally, 11.8%¹⁶⁹ of households contain 'lone parents', 12.9% of SICAP participants are classified as 'lone parent'. This is a minor level of divergence from national statistics but warrants further analysis across lower levels of geography to identify alignment/divergence from county/Lot level statistics.

Table 4.18: 'Lone Parent' by Age Band, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of parent row	% Of full DB
15-24	16,626	17.53%	17.53%
No	14,668	88.22%	15.47%
Requested but not provided	1,013	6.09%	1.07%
Yes	945	5.68%	1.00%
25-35	22,775	24.01%	24.01%
No	17,702	77.73%	18.67%
Requested but not provided	1,585	6.96%	1.67%
Yes	3,488	15.32%	3.68%
36-45	24,562	25.90%	25.90%
No	18,187	74.05%	19.18%
Requested but not provided	2,008	8.18%	2.12%
Yes	4,367	17.78%	4.60%
46-54	16,703	17.61%	17.61%
No	12,812	76.70%	13.51%
Requested but not provided	1,379	8.26%	1.45%
Yes	2,512	15.04%	2.65%
55-65	10,891	11.48%	11.48%
No	8,998	82.62%	9.49%
Requested but not provided	1,090	10.01%	1.15%
Yes	803	7.37%	0.85%
Over 65	3,281	3.46%	3.46%

¹⁶⁸ <https://data.cso.ie/table/SAP2016T5T1ED>

¹⁶⁹ Based on the sum of 'Mother and children', 'Father and children', 'Mother children and others', and 'Father children and others' over the total population.

No	2,691	82.02%	2.84%
Requested but not provided	484	14.75%	0.51%
Yes	106	3.23%	0.11%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%	100.00%

A cross tab assessment of this variable by age bands has found a non-response rate of 6-8% across the 15-45 age cohorts, while the older age bands (55-65 and Over 65) have an increased non-response rate of 10% and 15% respectively. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the older age bands constitute less than 2% of all programme participants.

4.6.3.13 * Person with a Disability

Variable Definition: This target group covers individuals who have a disability. The understanding of disability is broad and draws upon a number of recognised national and international definitions. SICAP applies a wider definition of disability in which the broader socio-economic complexities relating to disability are acknowledged and where mental health issues are often significant.

Disability is one of the six social inclusion barriers. 'Yes'/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information. It should be noted that this is a personal sensitive question and required explicit consent in the data consent form. The sensitive nature of the question could contribute to a higher rate of 'non-response' compared to other, less sensitive, questions. Indeed, the assessment of county level participation and non-response rate has found that the proportion of 'Requested but not provided' records for this variable ranges between 44% and 2%.

Table 4.19: 'Person with a Disability' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
No	72,607	76.56%
Not Requested	32	0.03%
Requested but not provided	14,082	14.85%
Yes	8,117	8.56%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable has an 85% response rate, which is above the upper 10% non-response rate benchmark set out for this assessment, indicating that there is a lower level of confidence in the variable. There is a high likelihood of inaccuracies in results if this variable is directly relied upon. Any reporting using this variable should be accompanied by appropriate caveats.

This question aligns with the CSO Census 'Person with Disability' variable, which allows for direct comparison with CSO data and the various levels of geography that census data is aggregated to (small area, electoral division, local authority, county, and national), thus ensuring alignment with SICAP Lots.

While Census 2016 indicates that, nationally, the disability rate is 13.5%, the rate recorded in the SICAP database is 8.6%. This level of divergence from national statistics (36%) may indicate, on the surface, a shortfall on the level of engagement by SICAP and/or participation by those with disability. However, the problem is more complex than that due to the very high non-response rate. Accounting for the nearly 15% rate of "Requested but not provided" records means that the proportion of SICAP participants with a disability may range between 8.6% and 23.4%. This level of ambiguity in the data will cause issues with representation, participation, and reporting on the topic of disability for SICAP.

Table 4.20: 'Person with a Disability' by Age Band, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of parent row	% of grand total
15-24	16,626	17.53%	17.53%
No	12,739	76.62%	13.43%
Not Requested	5	0.03%	0.01%
Requested but not provided	2,251	13.54%	2.37%
Yes	1,631	9.81%	1.72%
25-35	22,775	24.01%	24.01%
No	18,067	79.33%	19.05%
Not Requested	9	0.04%	0.01%
Requested but not provided	3,103	13.62%	3.27%
Yes	1,596	7.01%	1.68%
36-45	24,562	25.90%	25.90%
No	19,107	77.79%	20.15%
Not Requested	7	0.03%	0.01%
Requested but not provided	3,684	15.00%	3.88%
Yes	1,764	7.18%	1.86%
46-54	16,703	17.61%	17.61%
No	12,691	75.98%	13.38%
Not Requested	6	0.04%	0.01%
Requested but not provided	2,488	14.90%	2.62%
Yes	1,518	9.09%	1.60%
55-65	10,891	11.48%	11.48%
No	7,885	72.40%	8.31%
Not Requested	5	0.05%	0.01%

Requested but not provided	1,728	15.87%	1.82%
Yes	1,273	11.69%	1.34%
Over 65	3,281	3.46%	3.46%
No	2,118	64.55%	2.23%
Requested but not provided	828	25.24%	0.87%
Yes	335	10.21%	0.35%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%	100.00%

A cross tab assessment of this variable by age bands has found a non-response rate of 14-16% across the 15-65 age groups, while the 'Over 65' age band has an increased non-response rate of 25%. As stated above, consent to provide this information was required and has an impact on the non-response rate, as 'did not consent to provide' and 'consented but did not provide' responses are aggregated into 'Requested but not provided' records. Further analysis of these records and separation of participants who consented to answer the sensitive questions and those who did not consent would lead to the identification of the true 'non-response' rate for this variable.

4.6.3.14 Low Income Worker Household

Variable Definition: This target group covers individuals who were employed at the time of registration and are considered to be at risk of poverty due to low income (i.e., their employment situation may be precarious and low paid or are in receipt of Farm Assist or other allowances). 'Yes'/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information (only relevant for those who are employed/self-employed at registration).

Table 4.21: 'Low Income Worker Household' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
NA	71,662	75.56%
No	2,824	2.98%
Requested but not provided	1,449	1.53%
Yes	18,903	19.93%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

This variable contains too high a proportion of 'NA' records to facilitate a meaningful analysis.

4.6.3.15 Gender

Variable Definition: This is the gender of the individual (female, male, non-binary). Gender is mandatory and is self-declared by the individual.

Table 4.22: 'Gender' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
Female	48,591	51.24%
Male	46,144	48.66%
Other Gender	103	0.11%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

With a 100% response rate to this question, there are no issues with the quality of this variable. Furthermore, this question aligns with the CSO Census variable on the same topic, which allows for direct comparison with CSO data and the various levels of geography that census data is aggregated to (small area, electoral division, local authority, county, and national), thus ensuring alignment with SICAP Lots.

Table 4.23: Comparison of National Gender Profile to SICAP DB, SICAP 2022

Responses	National % (2016)	SICAP %
Female	50.6%	51.2%
Male	49.4%	48.7%
Other Gender	-	0.1%
Grand Total	100%	100%

Table 4.23 indicates close alignment with the national gender profile, with a minor overrepresentation of the female population. This data is an example of a variable that can be compared directly to Census data but would be vastly more valuable if the baselines for each target groups could be established through special tab request(s) to the CSO to derive more meaningful insights at a 'target group' level.

4.6.3.16 Nationality

Variable Definition: This is the nationality of the individual when they registered with SICAP. It should be interpreted as citizenship. Citizenship is defined as a legal relationship between an individual and their state, acquired by birth or naturalisation. Where an individual has dual citizenship, it is recommended that they select their primary nationality (i.e., their nationality at birth or used when entering the State). A category is selected if the individual provides this information.

Table 4.24: 'Nationality' variable overview, SICAP 2022

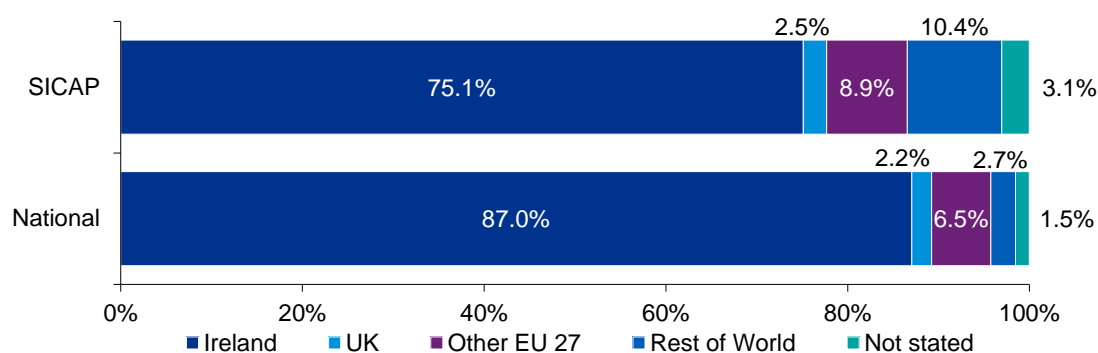
Responses	Count	% Of DB
Ireland	71,251	75.13%
UK	2,415	2.55%
EU	8,441	8.90%

Rest of Europe	2,003	2.11%
Africa	3,829	4.04%
Asia	2,013	2.12%
North America and Oceania	200	0.21%
Rest of World	1,793	1.89%
Not Stated	2,893	3.05%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

There is a 97% response rate to this question, therefore there is no issue with the quality of this variable. It should be noted that 'Not Requested' records are limited to data from 2018, indicating that there was a 99% response rate from 2019 onwards. This is due to this variable being classified as a 'personal sensitive question' for the first few months on the programme, then subsequently having that classification removed.

Furthermore, this question aligns with the CSO Census variable on the same topic, which allows for direct comparison with CSO data and the various levels of geography that census data is aggregated to (small area, electoral division, local authority, county, and national), thus ensuring alignment with SICAP Lots.

Figure 4.4: Comparison of Nationality Profile (2016) and SICAP DB, SICAP 2022



As shown in Figure 4.4, when compared to the nationality profile of Ireland from Census 2016, SICAP has a higher overall proportion of non-Irish participants. This is a significant target group for the programme too, encompassing three distinct categories with fewer alternative forms of support and reduced social capital in comparison with the indigenous Irish population.

4.6.3.17 New Communities

Variable Definition: This target group covers individuals from other EU Member States or from outside the EU who are resident/living in Ireland and belong to one of the three new community groupings detailed in Section 4.6.3.18. People living in direct provision

are included in this group as well. 'Yes'/'No' is selected if the individual provides this information.

Table 4.25: 'New Communities' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
NA	78,307	82.57%
No	2,542	2.68%
Yes	13,989	14.75%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

Given the nature of this variable, and the classifications set out within, this data could represent a useful resource for SICAP to report on the emergence of these 'New Communities' across the timeline of the current programme. However, the variable contains too high a proportion of 'NA' records to perform the more in-depth analyses undertaken for other variables.

4.6.3.18 New Communities Group

Variable Definition: This field identifies the new communities group individuals may belong to, namely asylum seekers, refugees or migrants experiencing disadvantage. Membership of an ethnic minority (which includes asylum seekers and refugees) is one of the six social inclusion barriers. A category is selected if the individual provides this information (only relevant for those who answered 'Yes' under New_communities).

Table 4.26: 'New Communities Group' variable overview, SICAP 2022

Responses	Count	% Of DB
NA	80,849	85.25%
Migrant experiencing socio-economic disadvantage	8,812	9.29%
Refugee	2,722	2.87%
Asylum Seeker	2,455	2.59%
Grand Total	94,838	100.00%

Given the nature of this variable, and the classifications set out within, this variable could be a useful resource for SICAP to report on the emergence of 'New Community Groups' across the timeline of the current programme. Nevertheless, the variable contains too high a proportion of 'NA' records to perform the more in-depth analyses undertaken on other variables.

5 Detailed Consultation Findings

5.1 Individual Beneficiary Consultation

This section presents an overview of key findings arising from the individual beneficiary consultation process. Section 5.1.1 presents the findings of the online survey with Section 5.1.2 outlining the findings of the online focus groups. Finally, assessments relevant to Targeting and Monitoring focus areas are included in Sections 5.1.3 and 5.1.4 respectively.

5.1.1 Online Survey Results

As detailed in the Methodology chapter, an online survey was disseminated through LDCs to individual beneficiaries of SICAP supports. The survey asked beneficiaries to assess the effectiveness of supports received depending on their motivation to engage with the programme, namely: further developing their skills, gaining employment, starting a business, receiving help to access government services, becoming more involved in the community, building their confidence, and improving their mental health, and wellbeing. **Table 5.1** shows the percentage of beneficiaries consulted who were interested in accessing each of these supports. The full list of questions asked in the online survey can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 5.1: Reasons for engaging with SICAP supports

Beneficiaries Aims	Response in Agreement* (%)
I wanted to improve my skills	60%
I wanted support to get a job, or to improve my chances of getting a job in the future	51%
I wanted support to start my own business	44%
I wanted support to access government services	35%
I wanted to meet people / be more involved in my community	43%
I wanted to build my confidence	60%
I wanted to improve my mental health and /or wellbeing	38%

*Note: Percentages reported in the table are based on the number of beneficiaries who answered 'Yes' to each of the questions included in this table relative to the total number of 646 beneficiaries who completed the online survey.

Moreover, SICAP beneficiaries were asked to evaluate their overall satisfaction with the support they had received and provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the services they had accessed from their Local Development Company of Partnership. The rest of this section provides a thematic account of beneficiary satisfaction with the supports received for each of these areas, based on the frequency with which certain aspects were raised or highlighted.

5.1.1.1 Overall Satisfaction with LDC or Partnership Supports

The online survey respondents were asked to choose one word to describe their overall experience of getting support from their Local Development Company or Partnership¹⁷⁰. Figure 5.1 shows the word cloud that was generated using 74 words that appeared at least twice across the 576 responses provided to this question. The most frequent word used to characterise LDC services was ‘excellent’, which appeared 87 times. Other terms used at least ten times included ‘helpful’ (40 occurrences), ‘good’ (34 occurrences), ‘great’ (27 occurrences), ‘supportive’ (23 occurrences), ‘satisfied’ (16 occurrences), ‘positive’ (13 occurrences), ‘amazing’ (12 occurrences), ‘brilliant’ (12 occurrences), ‘fantastic’ (12 occurrences), and life-changing (10 occurrences).

Figure 5.1: Overall Experience of Accessing LDC/Partnership Supports



The positive evaluation of LDC services captured in the word cloud above is corroborated in **Figure 5.2**, which presents the respondents’ satisfaction with services or supports

¹⁷⁰ The exact question asked was: “Please choose one word to describe your overall experience getting support from your Local Development Company or Partnership”.

received from their Local Development Company or Partnership. The overwhelming majority (92% or 581 individuals) of the 633 respondents who answered this question were at least 'somewhat' satisfied with the support they had received. Only about 8% of participants had a negative experience accessing LDC or Partnership supports.

Figure 5.2: Overall satisfaction with LDC/Partnership support

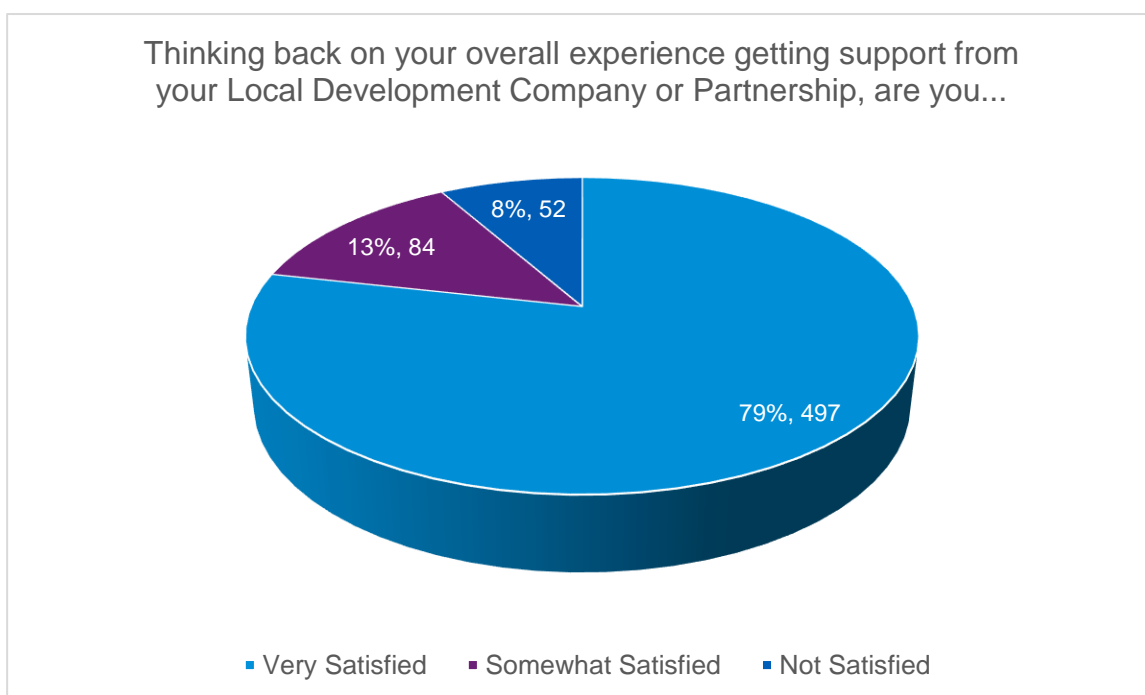


Figure 5.3 summarises the responses given by respondents when asked to summarise the best thing about the services they had received from their LDC or Partnership office. The single most frequently highlighted quality was the professionalism, kindness, and friendliness of the staff. More than a quarter (26%) of respondents highlighted tutors and mentors, along with coordinators and support staff, for being approachable, empathetic, eager to assist, supportive, and consistently prompt in their communication with users and disseminating useful information.

“The relationships the facilitators had/have with my client are so supportive and sensitive that it feels like such a safe and accepting place for her to be.”

“I feel that the staff have an advantage in that they are well educated and involved in local needs and know how to deliver that knowledge and support at a personal level.”

“The way in which staff treat the people receiving the service. They were very kind and respectful.”

While praising the quality of the courses on offer as well as the skills and knowledge gained, participants stressed the benefits of the personal interaction with their mentors and course leaders and the personalised programmes they received that took their experience and career goals into account. One-to-one engagement as well as the personal advice and support received were praised by over one-fifth (21%) of respondents, while 12% highlighted the benefits they derived from the availability of courses and training opportunities.

“It was personal, the people involved treated us honestly. The course was formally run and structured, but interpersonally speaking the experience was refreshingly more casual. Naturally the information of the course is what matters, but a good interpersonal dynamic is a great foundation, it leads you to feel understood on a basic level, and leads you to be more attentive to, and trusting of, the things you're being told.”

“Any of the staff that worked with me to help guide me towards my goals were just very friendly and down to earth. Which for me made the whole process of getting started up on my own business so much easier and less stressful”.

“Always have contact with the same person so makes me feel comfortable.”

“I didn't feel like I'm just one of many. I was listened to and advised 1-1.”

“Person to person relationship. I wasn't passed around as a problem to be solved.”

Respondents also drew attention to the accessibility and inclusiveness of the services provided by their LDC or Partnership services, which included the ability to locally avail supports, helping to strengthen ties with the local community. Respondents also expressed appreciation for the online services and remote course delivery, as well as the opportunities to meet and network with like-minded individuals facilitated by both in-person and online sessions.

“MNE staff are members of the local community which gives them a good understanding of local needs in order to advance and help its people.”

“The service was fast, they have great local connections, are supportive and encouraging. They need more visibility online promoting their services as I wish I had found them earlier on my journey.”

Nonetheless, a good number of respondents (7%) highlighted the effective manner of communication and information, as well as the smooth running of the supports provided.

“The down-to-earth manner in which staff communicate. No jargon just real.”

“All the information available from one source.”

Figure 5.3: Strengths of LDC / Partnership Supports

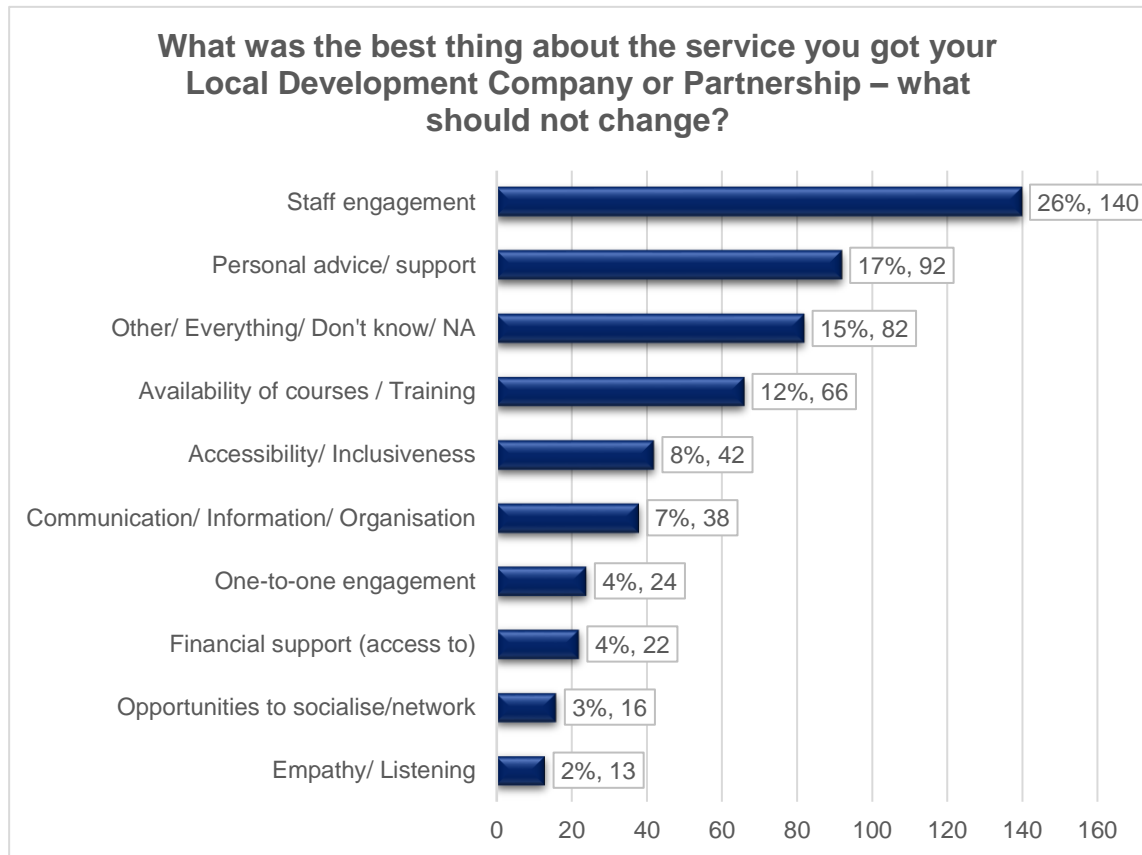


Figure 5.4 summarises the responses given by respondents when asked to indicate one aspect of their interaction with their LDC or Partnership office that should change. Notably, half (51%) of the respondents did not think any changes were necessary. Just over 10% of participants suggested a series of improvements in the courses and training schemes offered, such as increasing their variety and duration and ensuring they contain practical information. Several respondents thought that some of the courses were not specific enough and recommended that course and job placements should take into account previous work experience, education level, and career objectives.

“I feel like I could have done with a lot more support/ more specific help. I feel there is lots of potential for that, it just needed more experts/more specific courses.”

“I felt my local partnership were doing the best they could with what they had, they were friendly and eager to help, but they just didn't have the resources to help someone trained to be a specialist.”

Some respondents (6%) highlighted the necessity to enhance communication with users, ensuring that essential information on course scheduling, organisation, and contents is readily available.

“More clarity on what extra services / courses that might help.”

“Transparency on the website - more information.”

Participants (3%) also drew attention to the need for extensively promoting LDC/Partnership services to ensure that more people are aware of their availability. Better organisation, course scheduling, and a streamlined application process were also recommended by 3% of respondents. Other participants (4%) underscored the need to increase the assistance for accessing funding or other government services, such as welfare assistance.

“I just now know that I can have different help from this organisation, for example consultation about business, different sport sections. So, if you will show people more about your service and opportunities it'll be better.”

“That more people knew about the supports and help they provide. I wouldn't have thought to go there of my own accord.”

“Make the service more visible - I am sure there are plenty more people like me out there who just need a little push to start their own business.”

“Not known enough to mothers that want to upskill or return to work after children are older.”

“It would be great if the whole process didn't take as long as it did, with a lot of empty time in between everything.”

“The process needs to be much quicker or prospective business owners will be discouraged or fail through lack of financial support.”

“More direct access and contact with funding bodies.”

There were also calls (6%) to enhance the accessibility of supports, both by physically equipping the offices with wheelchair access and by increasing the delivery of courses online or closer to where people live. Several respondents also recommended extending the available schemes to all community groups.

“More availability of remote learning, where that learning yields qualifications of value to business development.”

“I would extend this provision to all community groups.”

“I would have them provide services to everyone who asks for help, fairly and equally, without making a difference between people who are on the dole and people who aren't.”

Participants also called for more person-centred supports (4%), including one-to-one engagement with dedicated officers, better trained and more empathic staff (4%), better

follow up (3%), and more assistance for jobseekers or people trying to set up their business (4%). Increasing in person contact (3%) and adding more networking opportunities into the mix (1%) were also suggested.

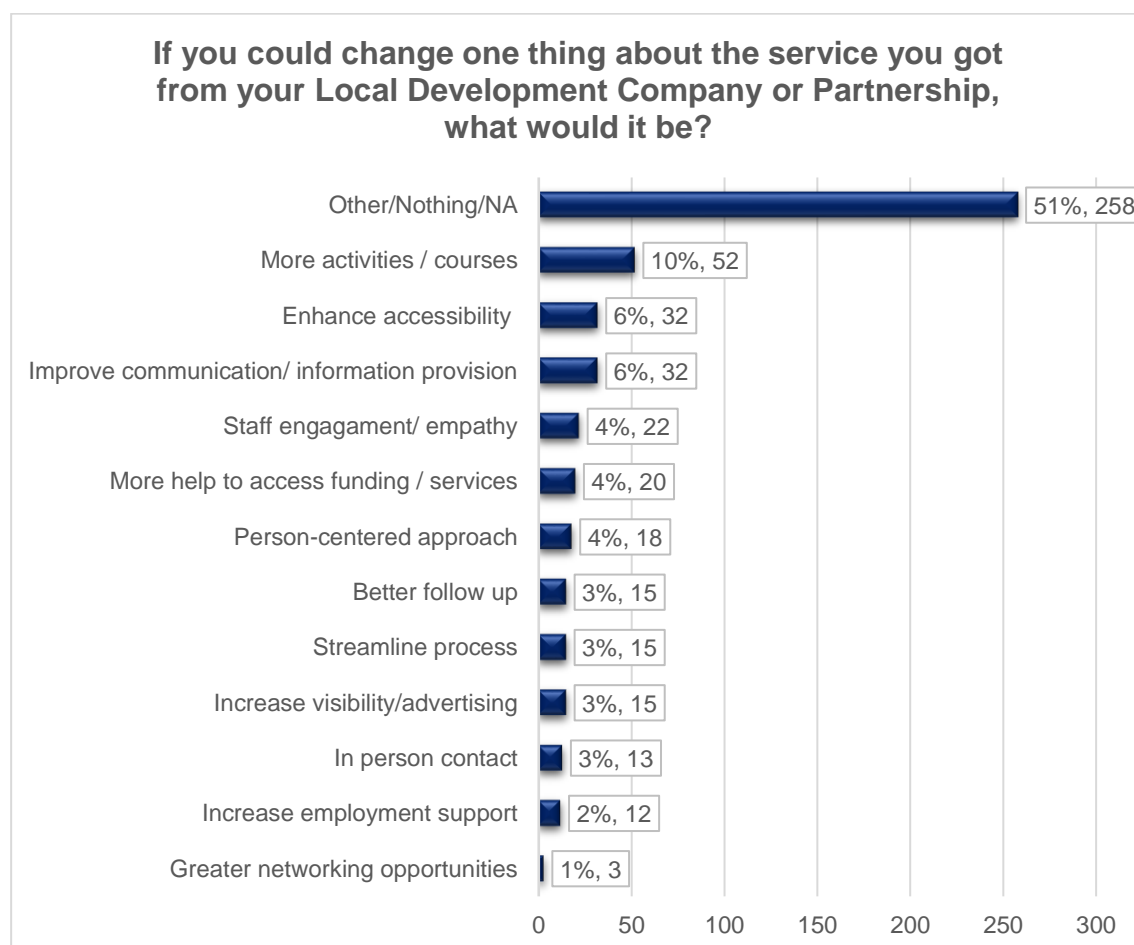
“Understand that people are at different levels and offer support based on this.”

“The support was general rather than specific to my needs.”

“To have constant access and support for a set period of time with regular review. The needs of the client should be assessed, and time allocated as per their needs.”

“Received lots of support while I was a member of an educational support programme for 6 six years. However, once I was finished with the programme and made it to third level, I received no support even after I was promised financial support etc. I didn't even receive a response to my emails or applications.”

Figure 5.4: Weaknesses of LDC / Partnership Supports



What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Figure 5.5 lists the most common reasons given by beneficiaries for their overall satisfactory experience with accessing the LDC or Partnership supports¹⁷¹. Among the top reasons for satisfaction mentioned, respondents highlighted the dedicated guidance and support received from the staff, which helped them achieve their goals, as well as the smooth organisation and efficient course delivery. There was a widespread perception that the staff, including tutors, managers, and support staff, were keenly interested in helping people and setting them up for success.

“I have always felt I could make contact with my local office with any questions I may have. They kept regular contact with me and advised me on various support I was entitled to.”

“I think the staff really were interested in getting something for me that worked.”

“I felt the people I was in contact with we're all interested and eager to help. I felt like we were working together to get results.”

“There was always a friendly voice at the other end of the phone.”

Satisfaction with job seeking supports, including CV and interview preparation, setting up a business, and advancing education was also strongly emphasised. Additionally, respondents singled out the importance of having access to dedicated advisors and receiving advice tailored to individual goals.

“I wouldn't have been able to start up my business without their help and now I am doing great 2 years on.”

“I'm currently in my first week of business as a self-employed person and I don't think it would have been possible without the help I received.”

“They supported me throughout my four years in university and they seemed genuinely interested in my progress.”

“I just needed support to upskill to find employment and I was given this support and am now working fulltime.”

“[T]hey work with you as an individual and listen to what your employment needs are and then give you the tools through courses and encouragement to achieve your goals.”

¹⁷¹ Results pooled from the following survey questions: “Please tell us why you were satisfied with the support you received” and “Please tell us why you were somewhat satisfied with the support you received”. Answers to both questions were pooled together as they were very similar (i.e., generally, respondents did not include any reasons why they were only “somewhat” satisfied as opposed to being “fully” satisfied with the support received).

Facilitating access to financial assistance for completing education, managing education expenses, or starting a business was also mentioned as a vital support by some respondents.

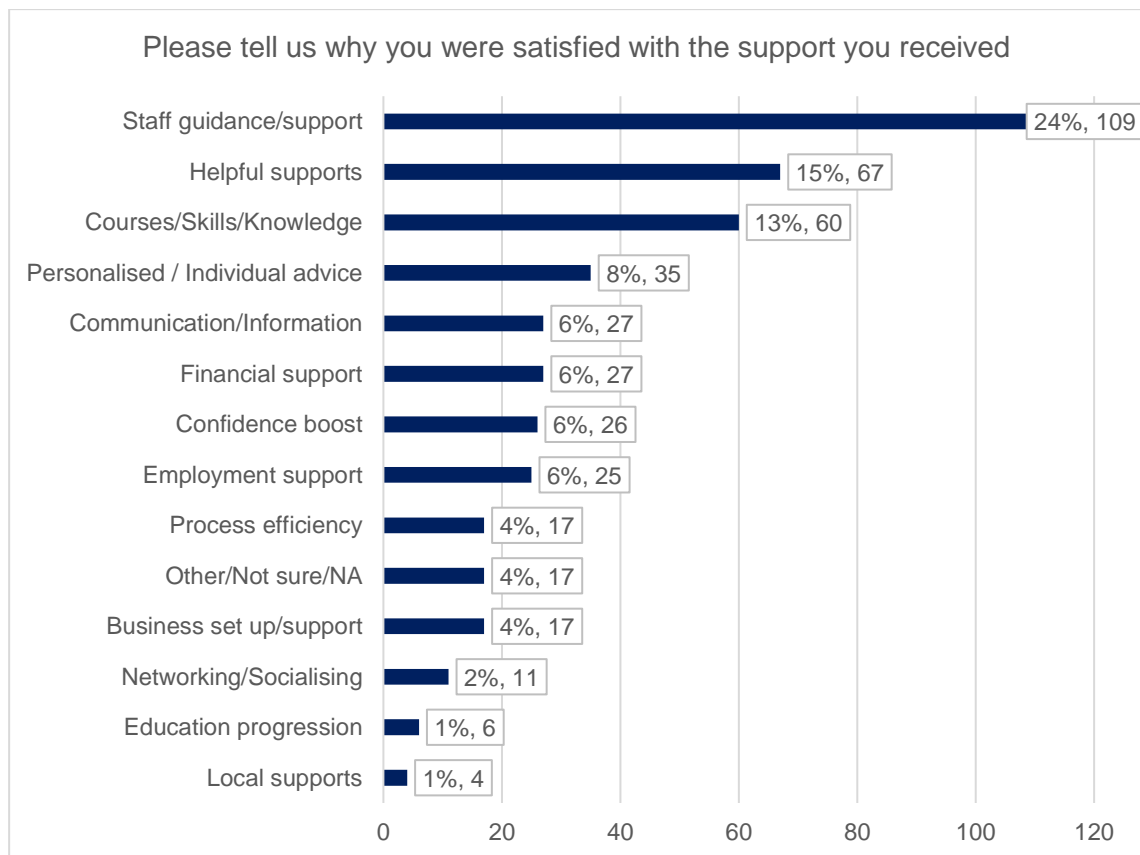
“Because it helped me to fund going to college and fulfilling my passion as I would not be able to afford it otherwise.”

“As a self-taught student, I rely on easily accessible services to support my education. Most educational services include a large fee that I would have been unable to cover. SICAP offered to help me on my journey to complete my Leaving Certificate, and I am forever grateful for the demonstrated generosity I have been granted.”

“I do not feel alone with my problems on setting business. Without their financial support, I would not have been able to start.”

“It gave me the financial backup to start up my own business especially because covid had my industry closed 60% since opening.”

Figure 5.5: Reasons for an overall satisfactory experience with LDC supports

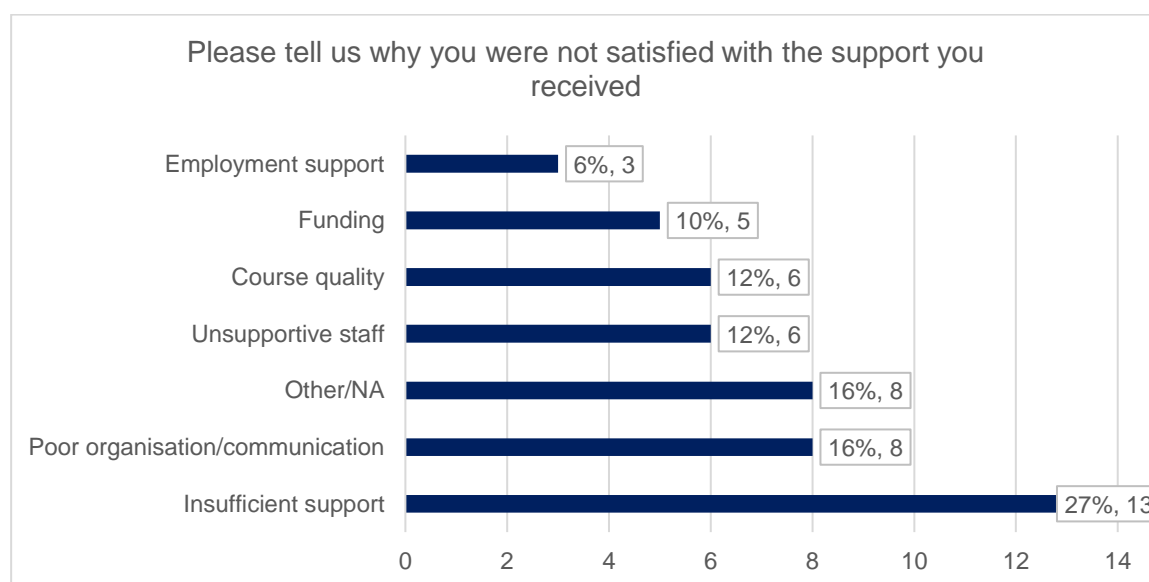


Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Online survey respondents who were not satisfied with the services they had accessed from their Local Development Company or Partnership felt that the support received was either minimal or insufficient to make a significant impact on their lives. The reasons for dissatisfaction listed in **Figure 5.6** include lack of communication or poor organisation of services and employment supports, unsupportive staff, insufficient financial assistance, inadequate course quality, and ineligibility for accessing supports.

“Not being listened to. Being pushed to enrol in courses that I'm not interested in or that are below my skills set.”

Figure 5.6: Reasons for dissatisfaction with LDC / Partnership supports



5.1.1.2 Skills Improvement

As shown in **Figure 5.7**, of the 646 respondents to the online survey, 60% (386 individuals) had sought the support of their Local Development Company or Partnership to improve various skills, such as literacy, numeracy, communication, and digital or employment-related skills.

Overall, as shown in **Figure 5.8**, over two thirds (73%) of respondents believed that their skills “really improved” as a result of the support received. Additionally, 21% believed that their skills improved “a bit”, while 6% of respondents felt that their skills did not improve. The remainder of this section provides a summary of the reasons cited by respondents who declared themselves satisfied or not satisfied with the supports they received to improve their skills.

Figure 5.7: Beneficiaries seeking skills improvement support

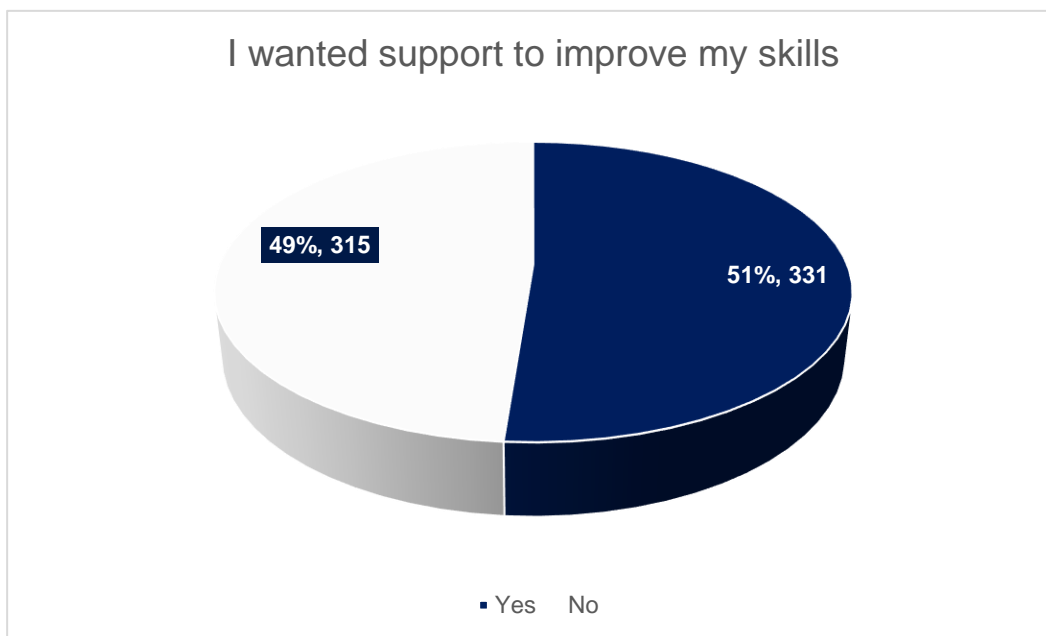
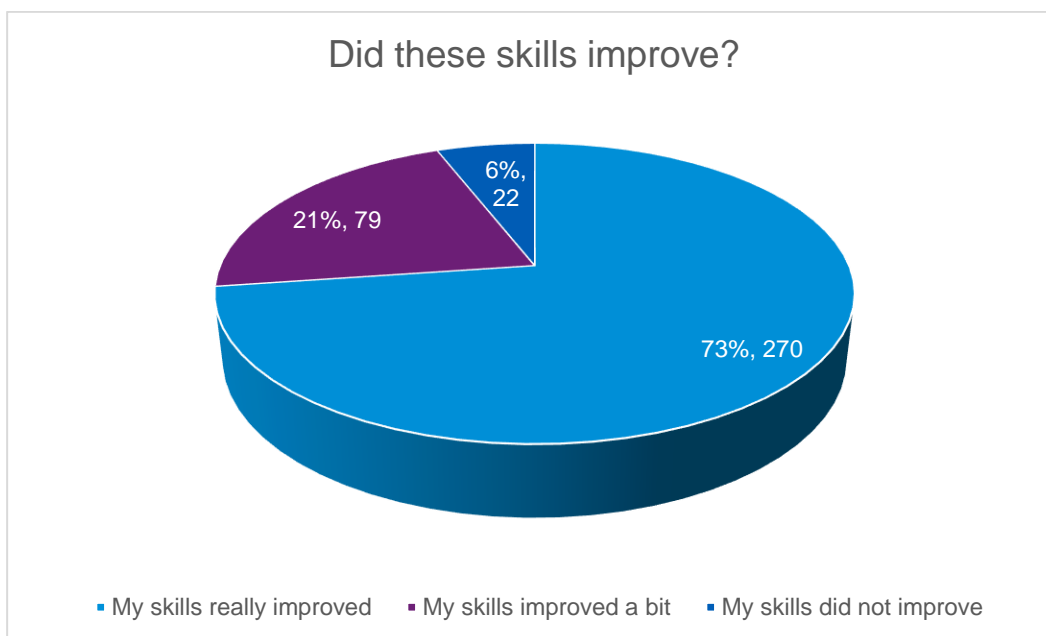


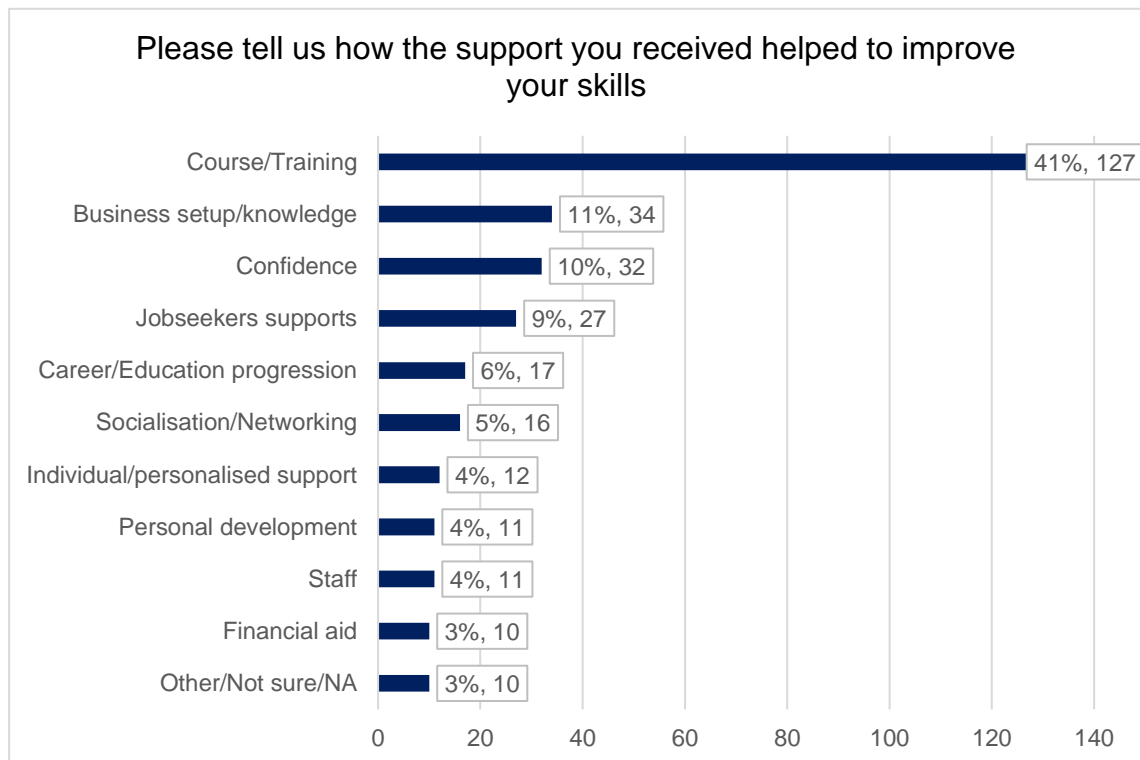
Figure 5.8: Satisfaction with 'Skills Improvement' Support



What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Figure 5.9 presents the reasons¹⁷² given by participants who believed that their skills improved as a result of the support they had received.

Figure 5.9: Supports Leading to Skills Improvement



41% of respondents pointed out the wide variety of courses they had enrolled in, ranging from business, tax, computer, and public speaking to driving theory, cookery, gardening, horse-riding to mindfulness. Several courses were more frequently mentioned, such as ‘Train the Trainer’, ‘Start Your Own Business’, and ‘Manual Handling’. Relevant content, motivating and supportive staff, one-on-one mentoring and support, and opportunities to practice were highlighted among the benefits of course attendance. The business

¹⁷² Results pooled from the following survey questions: “Please tell us how the support you received helped to improve your skills” and “Please tell us how the support you received helped to improve your skills a bit”. Answers to both questions were pooled together as they were very similar (i.e., generally, respondents did not include any reasons why the support they received only helped a bit as opposed to helping them fully to improve their skills). As part of their answers to the second question mentioned above, seven respondents evaluated the support received as insufficient. These responses were added to the ‘Other’ category.

courses were singled out by 11% of respondents as a most useful source of advice and support for those who aimed to set up their own businesses.

“Motivation and instruction as well as practice.”

“We were shown what to do, how to do it and how to source further information on our own.”

“During the course, I learned a lot about starting my own business. As well as the information that was provided during the course, I have found the various workbooks, spreadsheets, and fillable PDFs very useful.”

Among other benefits, 6% of respondents mentioned the support received for advancing their formal education, including enrolling in or completing college degrees. They also appreciated the advantage of having their skills certified, as well as the opportunity to refresh skills used in current jobs. Additionally, 9% of respondents appreciated the job market support received. This included CV and interviewing advice, as well as assistance in identifying job opportunities, applying, and ultimately securing full-time employment. The financial assistance received was also seen as an invaluable support for starting or completing third-level education by 3% of respondents.

“With the financial support offered I was able to attend a course that enabled me to apply for third-level education.”

“I updated my understanding of business management skills and gained formal training certificate in Training Design and Delivery, which led to a great job opportunity.”

“I got great support in improving my communication and digital skills which has helped me compete in a great health care support course which has enabled me to successfully participate in an interview which I have been offered a fantastic opportunity as a healthcare support assistant.”

“CV preparation and interview techniques at Dublin Northwest helped me to return to work after my career break.”

Other notable benefits included confidence building (10%) and various personal development aids (4%), such as thinking outside the box, ability to listen and communicate, socialisation, and networking (5%).

“The knowledge and encouragement helped me kick-start my first steps and have the confidence to go for it.”

“Not only did it show/give me the skills, it made me believe I could use the skills to set up my own business.”

“It helped my mental health throughout the pandemic, gave me coping mechanisms.”

“I learned about how community groups work and made great connections.”

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

As shown in **Figure 5.10**, only 19 respondents believed that the support they received was not conducive to sufficient learning or skills improvement. 42% of these participants indicated that they had neither attended a course, nor received any kind of support. The remaining 11 participants did not find the courses advanced enough or relevant for their needs, while others did not get the opportunity to enrol or finish the courses they were referred to for various reasons (e.g., work duties, course cancellation, ineligibility to avail of supports etc.). Four other participants found that the support they received was not sufficient to improve their skills.

“I ended up doing a weekly zoom call about C.V., Interview and Voicemails.”

“Classes got cancelled due to the pandemic.”

“It was just a beginner’s course in computer skills, I was looking for more advanced skills which were not available.”

“Too much info for a one-day course.”

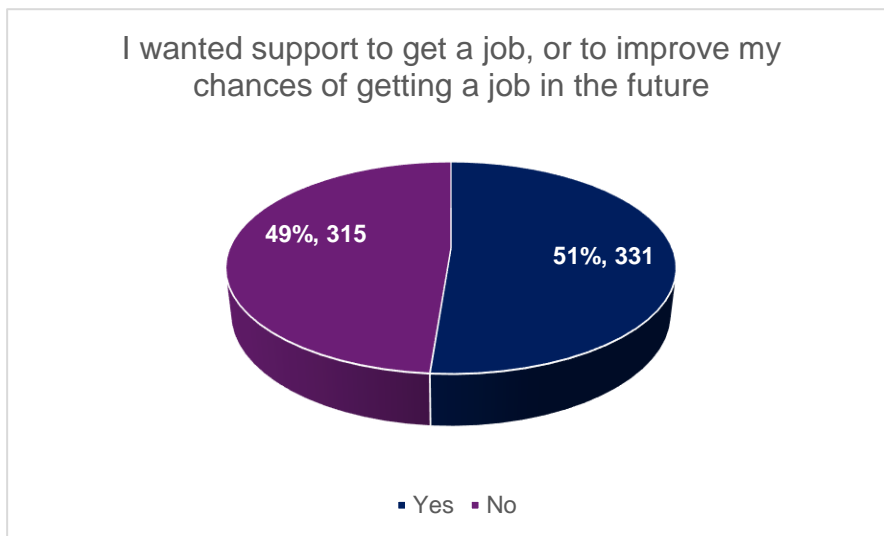
Figure 5.10: Reasons for non-satisfactory skills improvement support



5.1.1.3 Employment Supports

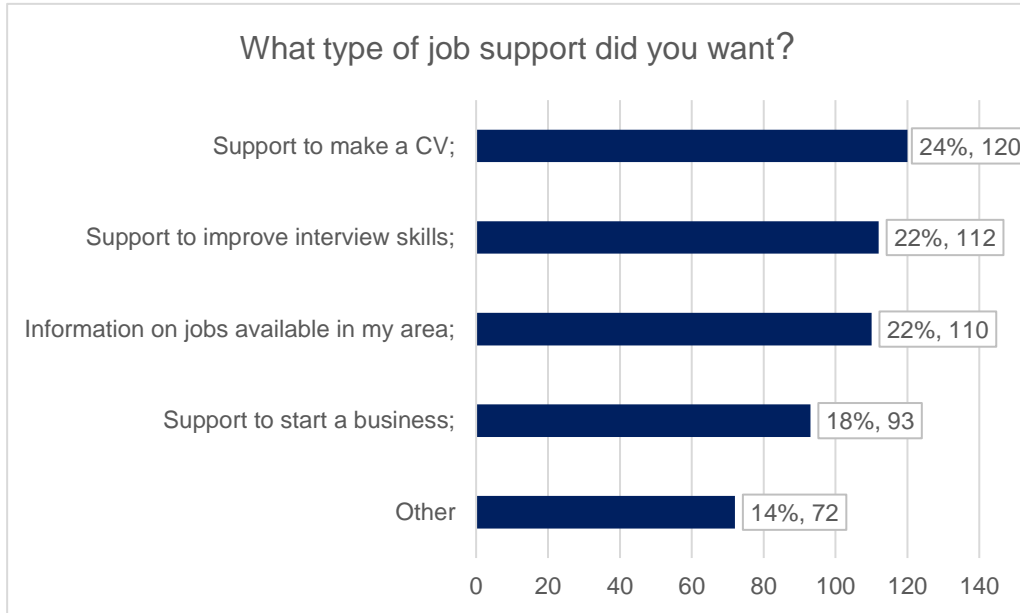
Just over half (51%) of the 646 participants to the online survey sought the support of their Local Development Company or Partnership to get a job, or to improve their chances of getting a job in the future (Figure 5.11). When asked about the type of employment support they were interested in, which is detailed in Figure 5.12, 24% of respondents pointed to help with writing a CV; 22% indicated support to improve interview skills; 22% chose information on jobs available in their area; and 18% were interested in support to start a business. Additionally, 14% of respondents expressed interest in additional type of supports. These included upskilling in specific areas (e.g., healthcare, nursing, driving, computer literacy, presentation skills, managing, mediating, UX design), counselling, college funding, socialising, or confidence building¹⁷³.

Figure 5.11: Beneficiaries seeking employment supports



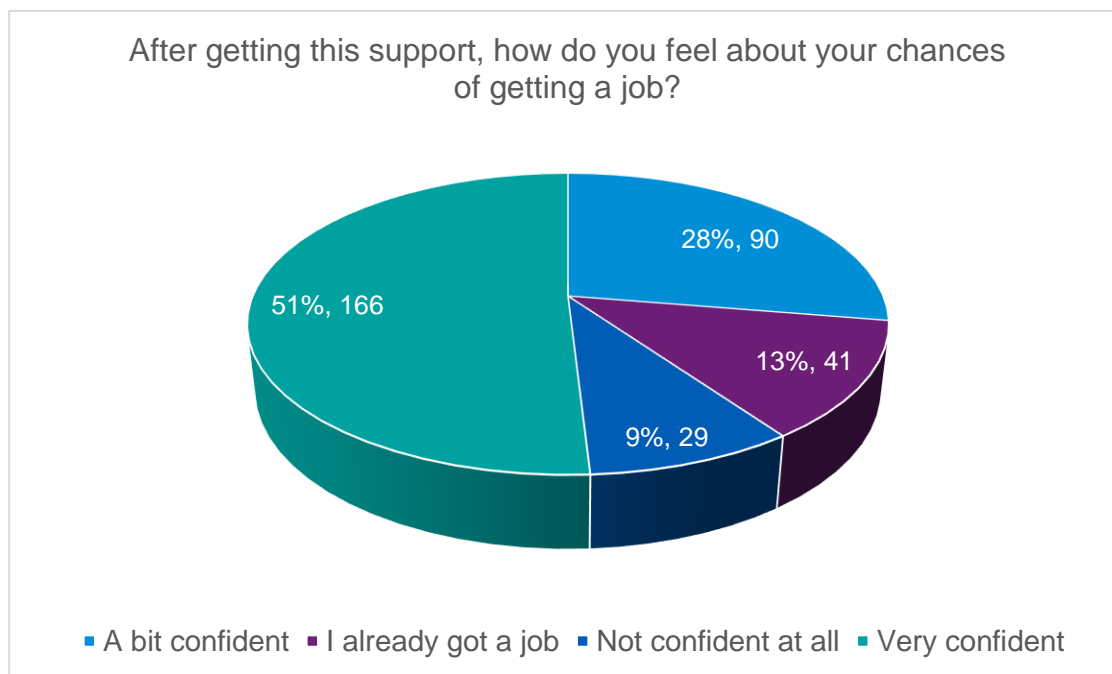
¹⁷³ Please note that respondents could select one or more of the options shown in Figure 5.12.

Figure 5.12: Interest in type of employment supports



Overall, as shown in **Figure 5.13**, the majority (51%) of respondents felt 'very confident' about their chances of getting a job after receiving support. Another 28% felt 'a bit confident', while 9% did not feel confident at all about their chances of gaining employment. Note that 13% of the respondents who sought employment supports indicated that they had already secured employment. The remainder of this section provides a summary of the reasons cited by respondents who declared themselves satisfied or not satisfied with the employment supports received.

Figure 5.13: Satisfaction with employment support

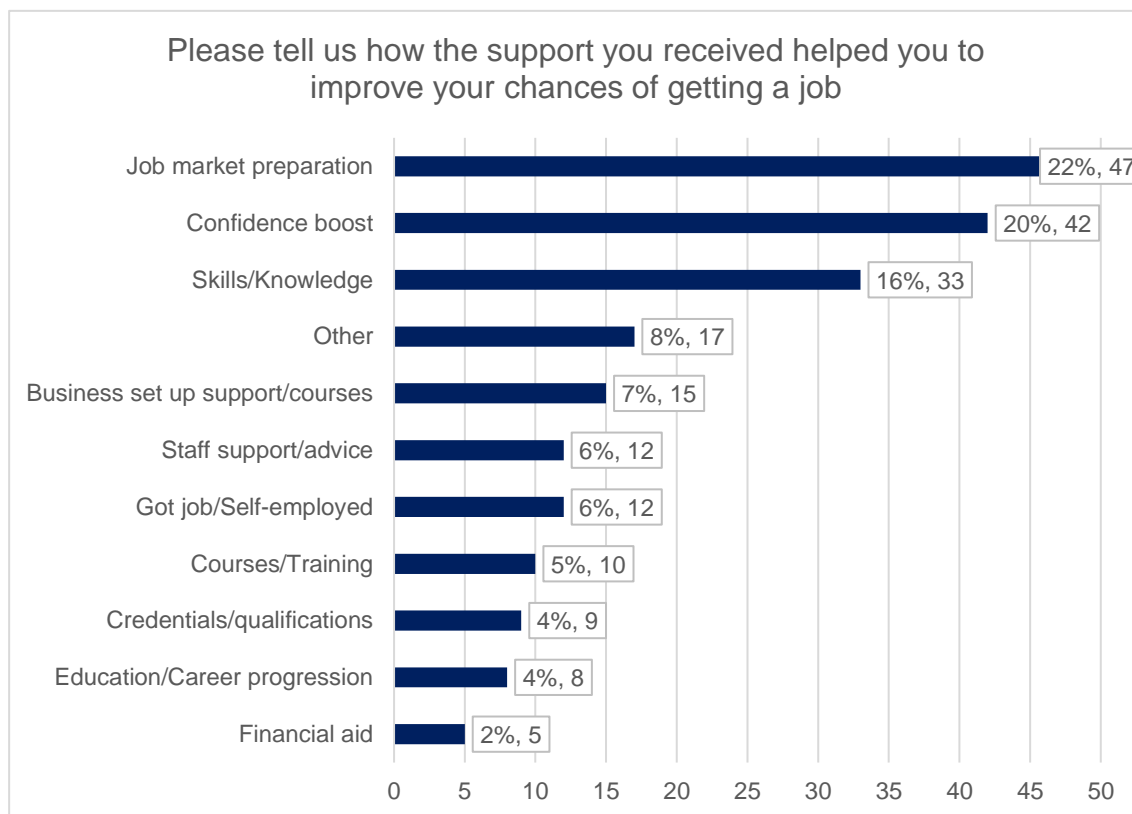


What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Figure 5.14 lists the reasons for satisfaction provided by respondents who felt “very confident” or “a bit confident” that the support received helped them improve their chances of getting a job¹⁷⁴.

¹⁷⁴ Results pooled from the following survey questions: “Please tell us how the support you received helped you to improve your chances of getting a job.” and “Please tell us why you think the support you received helped you to improve your chances of getting a job a bit.” Answers to both questions were pooled together as they were very similar (i.e., generally, respondents did not include any reasons why the support they received only helped a bit as opposed to helping them fully to get a job). As part of their answers to the second question mentioned above, five respondents evaluated the support received as insufficient. These responses were added to the ‘Other’ category.

Figure 5.14: Reasons for satisfaction with employment supports



Job market preparation, including help in updating CVs and preparing for interviews, was the single most helpful support that 22% of respondents believed improved their chances of getting a job. The confidence boost felt by 20% of beneficiaries who felt better prepared to enter the job market or return to full-time education was a close second.

“It prepared me for upcoming interviews and allowed me to promote and update my CV.”

“It gave real world advice relevant to the job rather than general information. Job specific advice and knowledge was what helped.”

“The training helped me how to write a CV, interview skills and ways to look for a job.”

“One to one working on my CV. Building confidence and to improve on techniques for an Interview. Guest speakers organised to talk about the current jobs market.”

Refreshing old skills and learning new ones also made 16% of respondents feel more confident about their chances of getting a job. Several courses such as Start Your Own Business and Manual Handling were singled out as particularly helpful in this regard.

Some respondents (7%) felt supported and motivated to set up their own business, while 6% of participants managed to get full-time employment or became self-employed.

“They helped me get my confidence back and apply for jobs.”

“I renewed my skills and felt more confident in my ability to do the job I applied for.”

“The ‘Start Your Own Business’ course provided all the information needed to succeed.”

“I was on a ‘Start Your Own Business’ and also seed course and both informed me fully.”

Obtaining course certificates and qualifications relevant for current employment or future jobs as well as going back to college or completing college degrees also made respondents more confident in their chances of securing employment or getting promoted in their current job. Various financial supports, opportunities to socialise or network, awareness about the availability of community supports, and the dedication of the staff and tutors were also highlighted as key factors that helped users to navigate the job market more effectively.

“It put me on the right path, I returned to education, and I am now working as a recruitment consultant”.

“I know I am more employable as a student nurse and, once I qualify, I will be guaranteed a job.”

“Being able to afford to go to college; and the support for travel and food expenses really helped me get more confident in applying for jobs.”

“I was given support, advice and information from my Community Development Officer on what courses I needed to complete to upskill for the job roles I was interested in doing.”

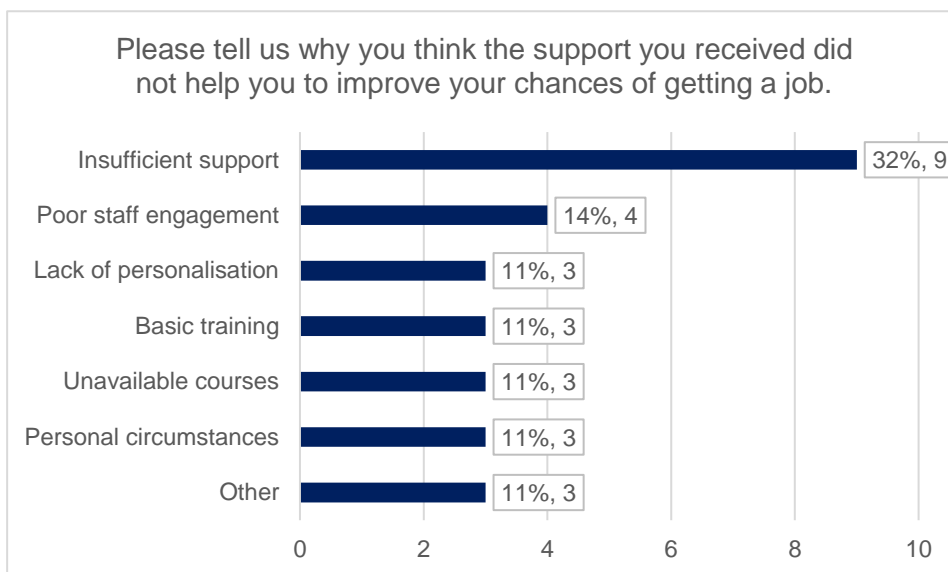
“I was given support on every level and every step of the way in starting my own business.”

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Only 28 respondents were not satisfied with the employment support they received. As shown in Figure 5.15, one third of these participants believed that the supports received were insufficient to improve their employability. Other respondents had negative experiences with their support workers, which included too little or too much follow up (4 participants) or indicated not having been provided with supports that matched their needs (3 respondents). Other programme beneficiaries were disappointed about not being able to sign up for the courses they were interested in (3 participants) or believed

that the courses offered had not been advanced enough or relevant for their needs (3 participants). Three respondents cited personal circumstances as a reason for being unable to get a job, such as age, a niche specialisation, or financial difficulties.

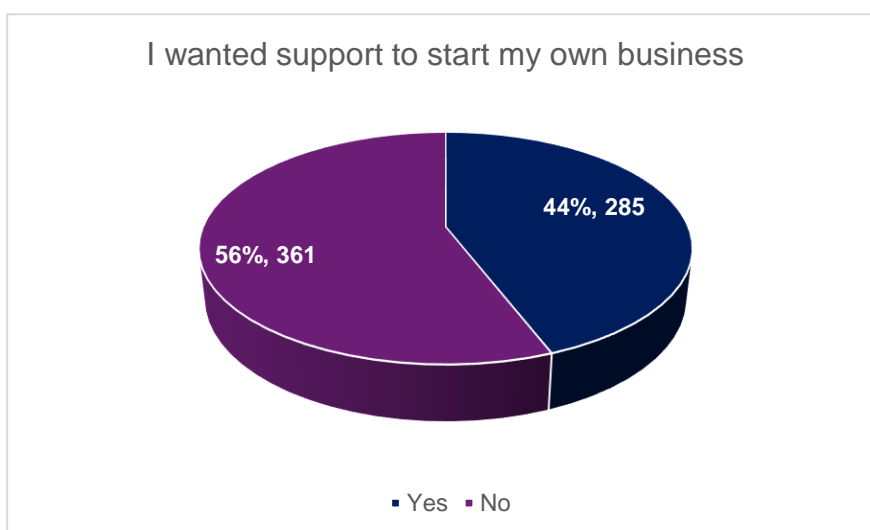
Figure 5.15: Reasons for non-satisfactory employment supports



5.1.1.4 Starting a Business

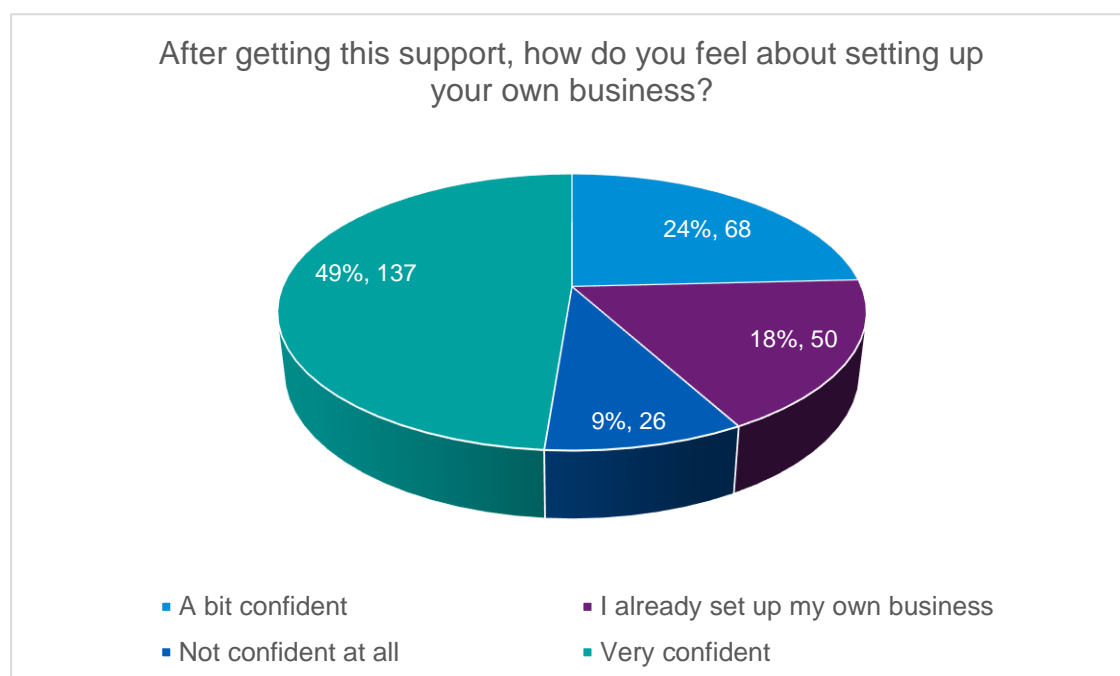
Just under half (44%, or 285 individuals) of the 646 participants to the online survey had sought the support of their Local Development Company or Partnership to start their own business (Figure 5.16).

Figure 5.16: Beneficiaries seeking business setup supports



Overall, as shown in Figure 5.17, just under half (49%) of respondents felt ‘very confident’ about setting up their own business after receiving support. Another 24% felt ‘a bit confident’, while 9% did not feel confident at all about their chances of gaining employment. Note that 18% of the respondents who indicated that they were seeking support to start their own business stated that they had already succeeded in doing so. The remainder of this section provides a summary of the reasons cited by respondents who declared themselves satisfied or not satisfied with the supports received to start their own business.

Figure 5.17: Satisfaction with business startup supports

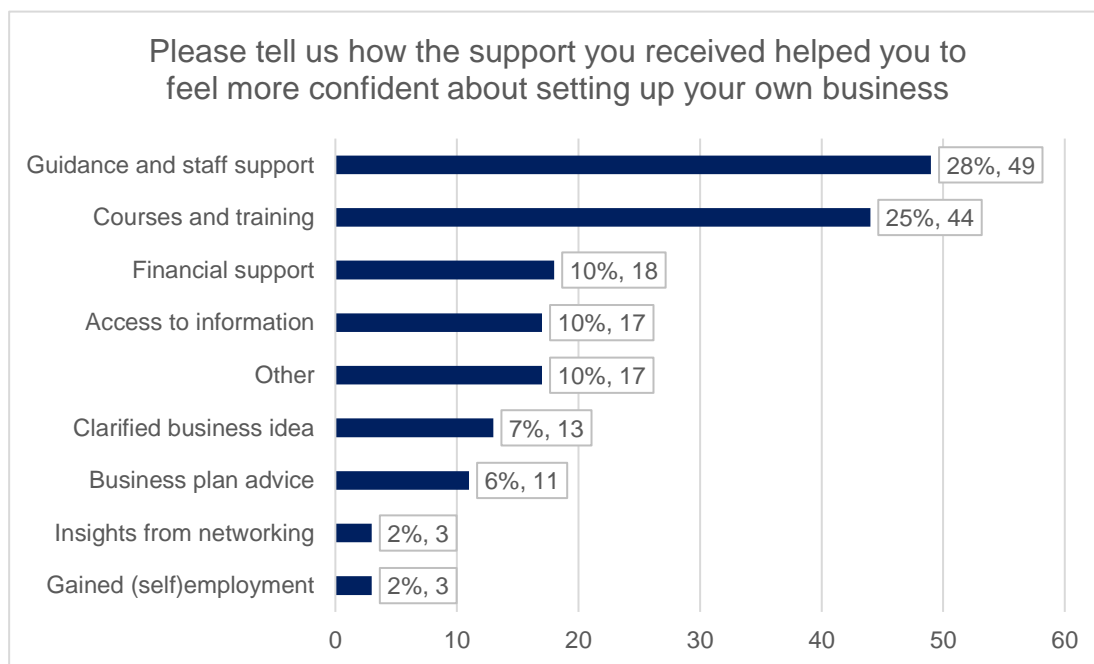


What is Working Well – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Figure 5.18 lists the reasons for satisfaction provided by respondents who felt “very confident” or at least “a bit confident” that the support received helped them feel more confident about setting up their own business¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷⁵ Results pooled from the following survey questions: “Please tell us how the support you received helped you to feel more confident about setting up your own business.” and “Please tell us why you think the support you received helped you to feel a bit more confident about setting up your own business.” Answers to both questions were pooled together as they were very similar (i.e., generally, respondents did not include any reasons why the support they received only helped a bit as opposed to helping them fully

Figure 5.18: Reasons for satisfaction with business setup supports



More than half (53%) of the respondents believed that the guidance and support received from the staff, and the knowledge gained from various business courses had massively contributed to their efforts in setting up their own business. The Start Your Own Business was highly praised by many respondents, as were other courses on revenue, taxation, and marketing. Other programme beneficiaries (6%) singled out the support received to develop or fine-tune their business plan as well as the advice that helped clarify their business idea and assess its viability (7%).

“They introduced me to resources but most of all they supported me every inch of the way, through attitude, through helping with paperwork. Everything. They were amazing.”

“Support through conversation and training allowed me to complete steps in setting up the business and begin running it with some knowledge and insight.”

“The course provided a broad overview of the requirements for setting up a business and gave me a place to discuss and think about my business.”

to feel more confident about starting their own business). As part of their answers to the second question mentioned above, only three respondents evaluated the support received as insufficient to help them set up or maintain a successful business. These responses were added to the ‘Other’ category.

“I had help developing my business plan and accessing advice re financial management. It was invaluable.”

“I was able to really look at my business and answer questions on how it could support me and support my future.”

The importance of receiving a start-up grant and other types of financial support was also praised by 10% of respondents, as was access to clear and easily available information (10%) and the opportunity to meet and exchange views with people in similar circumstances (2%). Additionally, 2% of respondents were content that the supports received helped them get back into work or indeed start their own business.

“I had financial backing, so I was able to focus on my building a clientele with some financial stress taken away.”

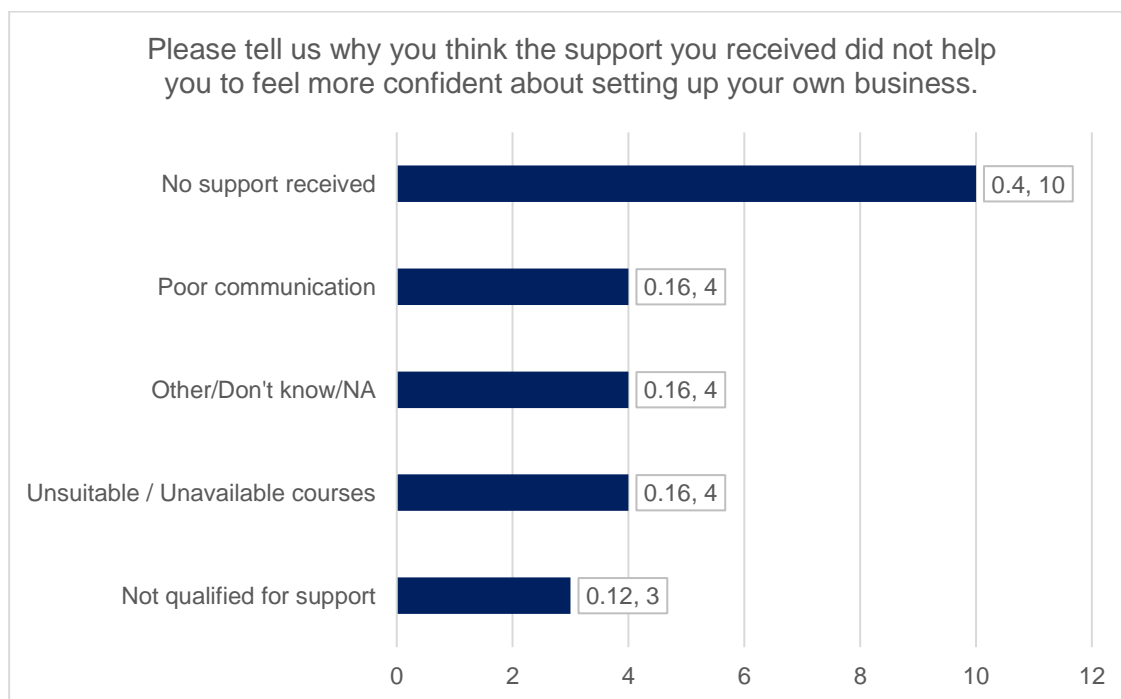
“The support helped me with start-up cost and provided encouragement for the initial business idea which I found very beneficial.”

“One of the big challenges is starting, knowing how to talk to, where to go and who to ask. NSP were quick on email responses and clear on information. This assisted a great deal.”

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The reasons respondents provided for dissatisfaction with supports received to start their own business are shown in Figure 5.19.

Figure 5.19: Reasons for dissatisfaction with business setup supports



The beneficiaries who did not feel supported to set up their own business pointed towards the unavailability of support geared towards their specific needs. Ten individuals complained that no support was available from staff or mentors and that no suitable course was offered, while four others could not find any help to develop their specific business ideas. There were also four complaints about unprofessional tutors and poor communication around course schedule and registration. Additionally, several respondents expressed dissatisfaction that they did not qualify for supports available only to people who are long-term unemployed. However, eligibility requirements for different government supports are outside the remit of SICAP.

“I was refused any assistance because I was not on social welfare. I was advised I would only be given help if I was on the dole. I explained I do have a job, but it is minimum wage can’t exactly afford the services of these places and explained the potential for employment. I was refused help or access to any of the support / courses because I wasn’t on the dole.”

“Each course I contacted had a 'legitimate' excuse for not running the course, or they were essentially delaying it to the end of the year at which point they would run a quick course to tick a box so that they could still avail of the funding.”

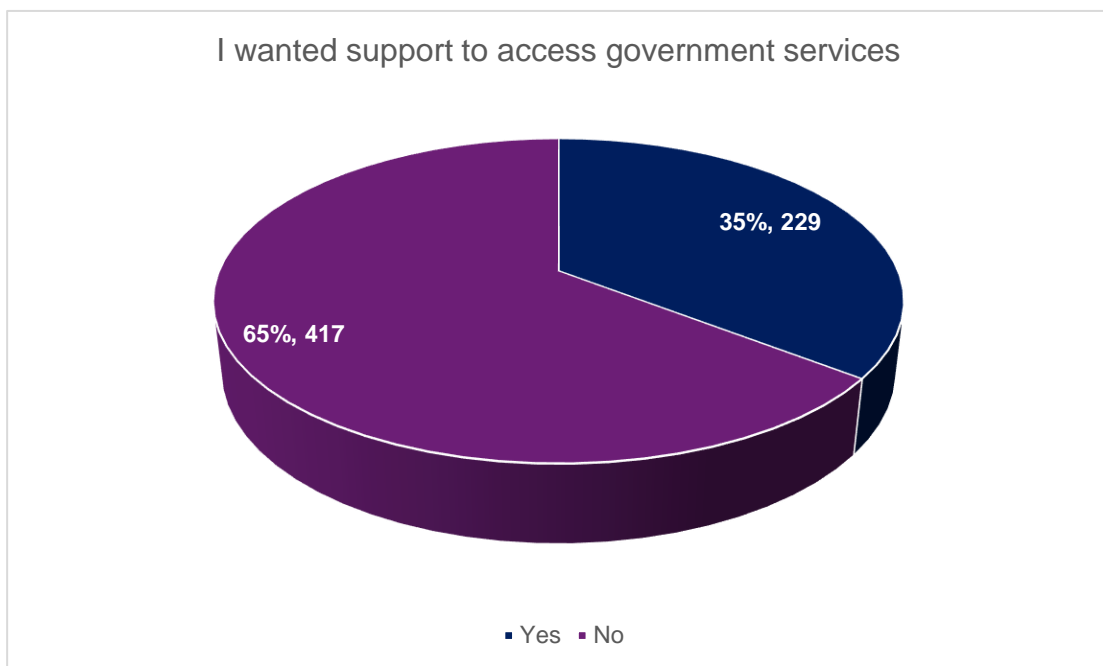
“While the workshops on starting up a business were very good, longer more detailed courses on starting up a business were largely out of county,

and since I'm unable to drive it would have involved a lengthy commute and possible covid contact. I could really have used some more online help.”

5.1.1.5 Access to Services

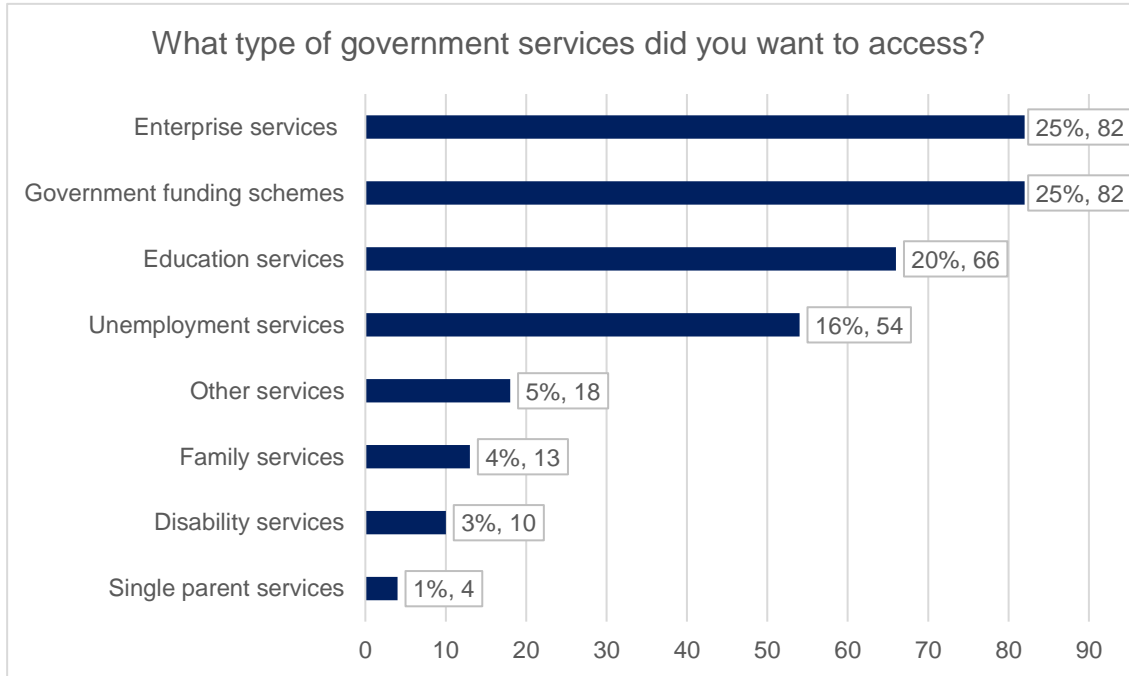
Just over one third (35%, or 229 individuals) of the 646 participants to the online survey had sought the support of their Local Development Company or Partnership to access government services (Figure 5.20). When asked about the type of government services they wanted to access, which is detailed in Figure 5.21, 25% of respondents pointed to the enterprise and government services each (i.e., one half in total); 20% indicated education services; 16% chose unemployment services; 4% selected family services; 3% went for disability services; and 1% selected single parent services. Additionally, 5% of respondents mentioned additional type of supports that they would be interested in, such as the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) scheme, housing, mental health services, revenue, transportation, business setup supports, and community meeting places¹⁷⁶.

Figure 5.20: Beneficiaries seeking support to access government services



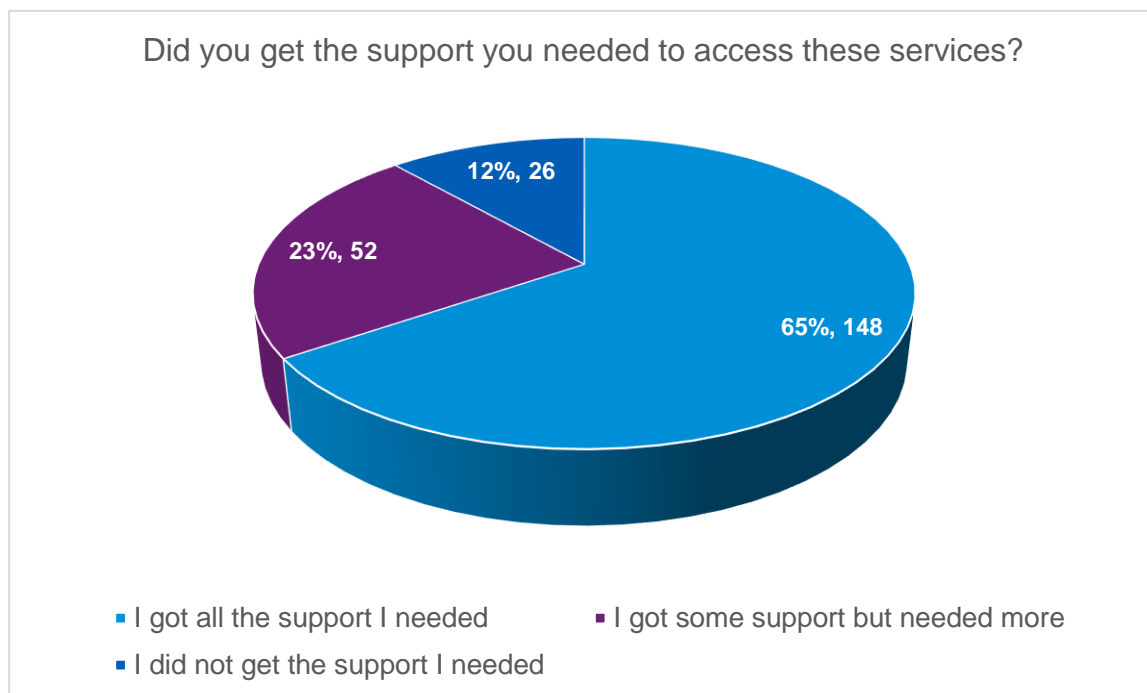
¹⁷⁶ Please note that respondents could select one or more of the options shown in Figure 5.21.

Figure 5.21: Interest in type of government services



Overall, as shown in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**, almost two thirds (65%) of respondents believed that they received all the support that they wanted. Additionally, 23% of respondents believed that, while they received some support, they would have needed more help. Only 12% of respondents felt that they had not received the support they needed. The remainder of this section provides a summary of the reasons cited by respondents who declared themselves satisfied or not satisfied with the supports received to access government services.

Figure 5.22: Satisfaction with access to government services supports

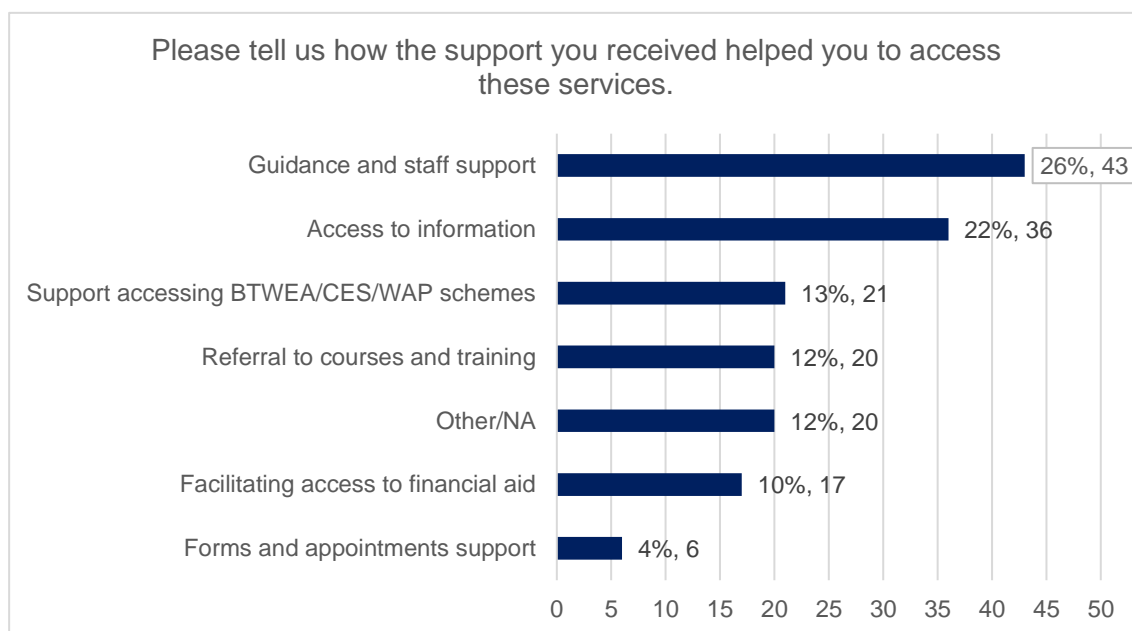


What is Working Well – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Figure 5.23 shows the reasons for satisfaction provided by respondents who believed that the support received had helped them access government services¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁷ Results pooled from the following survey questions: “Please tell us how the support you received helped you to access these services.” and “Please tell us how the support you received helped a bit to access these services.” Answers to both questions were pooled together as they were very similar (i.e., generally, respondents did not include any reasons why the support they received only helped a bit as opposed to helping them fully to feel more confident about starting their own business). As part of their answers to the second question mentioned above, six respondents evaluated the support received as insufficient. These responses were added to the ‘Other’ category.

Figure 5.23: Reasons for satisfaction with support to access government services



Among the supports enabling access to government services, respondents singled out access to clear information (22%) as well as the guidance received from tutors and support staff (26%). This guidance included detailed explanation of available supports, help with making business plans, writing cover letters, and updating CVs, help with forms and applications (4%), and advice about suitable courses and the steps required to access additional supports. Particular mention was made of support in accessing various employment schemes (13%), such as the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) scheme and the Community Employment Scheme (CES). Other programme beneficiaries were highly appreciative of the courses they were referred to (12%), noting that they were extremely beneficial. Additionally, beneficiaries were satisfied with the assistance they received in accessing financial aid (10%), considering it as a key support for upskilling or starting their own business.

“The advice I got led me in the right direction to access these services”.

“The staff were excellent and offered me the information I needed to access the supports.”

“I find It difficult to access these services as the process is often made complicated. I find the staff who helped me extremely professional and willing. I really appreciated their help and had no problem accessing the services.”

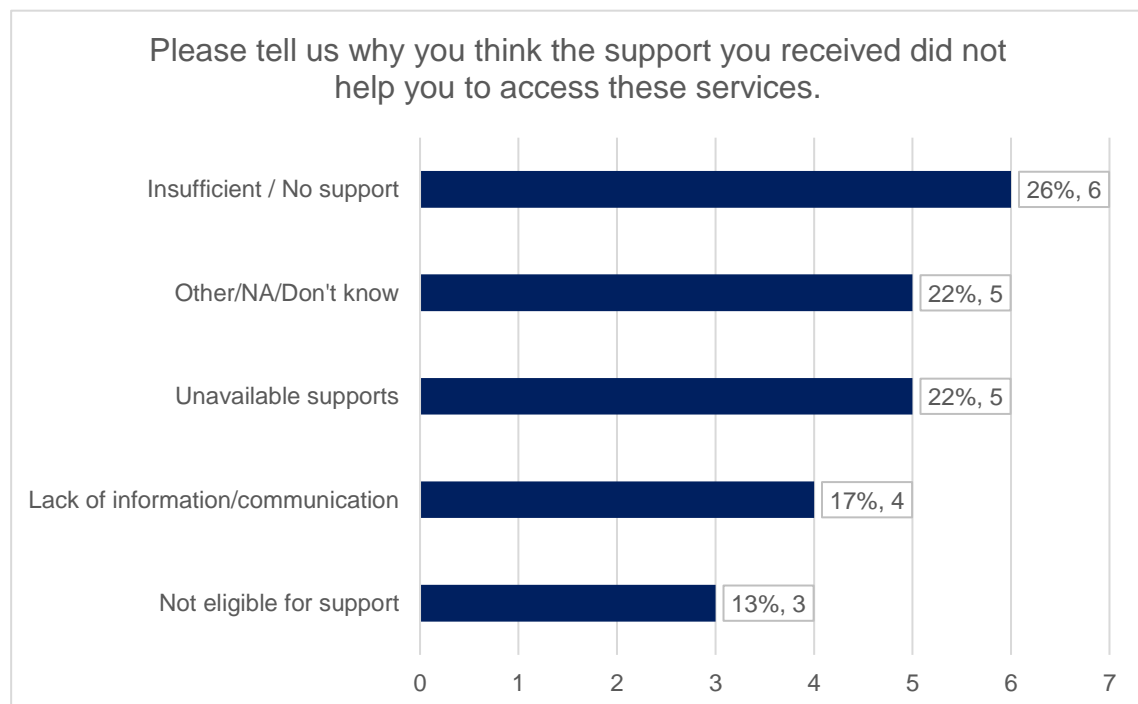
“The staff were eager and interested enough to guide me in the right direction and make sure I was prepared for whatever next steps were required.”

“I was smoothly guided through the steps with the ultimate goal of opening my own business. I received financial and mental support and was properly prepared, from training in this area to periodic inspections and checking how I am doing in my own company. I'm very happy.”

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Figure 5.24 summarises the reasons provided for dissatisfaction with the support received to access government services. Almost half of the respondents did not elaborate on their reasons for dissatisfaction. About one quarter (22%) of respondents pointed towards the unavailability of supports for specific needs or their ineligibility to access these services (13%). However, as noted above, eligibility requirements for different government supports are outside the remit of SICAP. Additionally, just under one fifth (17%) of respondents were dissatisfied with the information that they received about the next steps that they needed to take, the slow communication with their mentors, and the absence of guidelines.

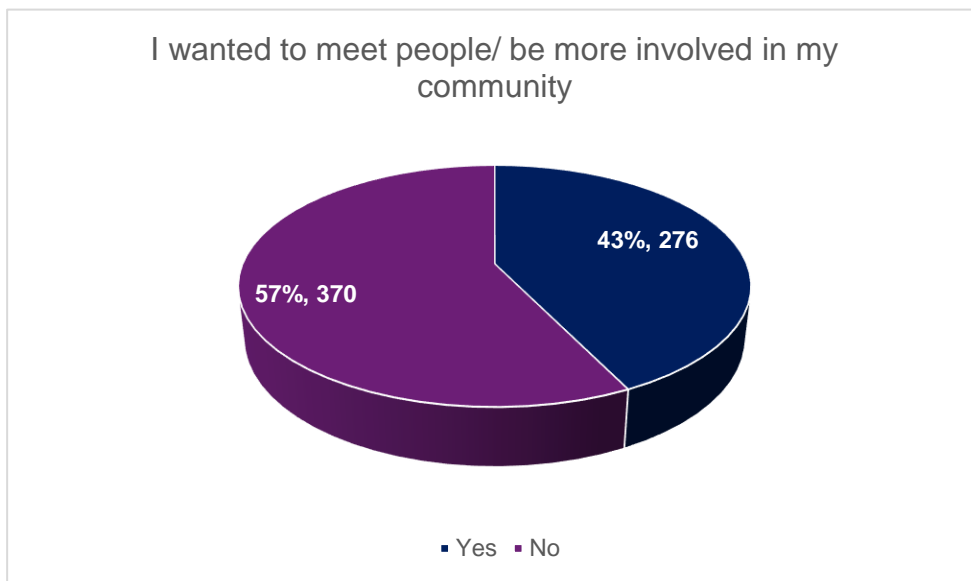
Figure 5.24: Reasons for dissatisfaction with supports received to access government services



5.1.1.6 Enhancing Community Involvement

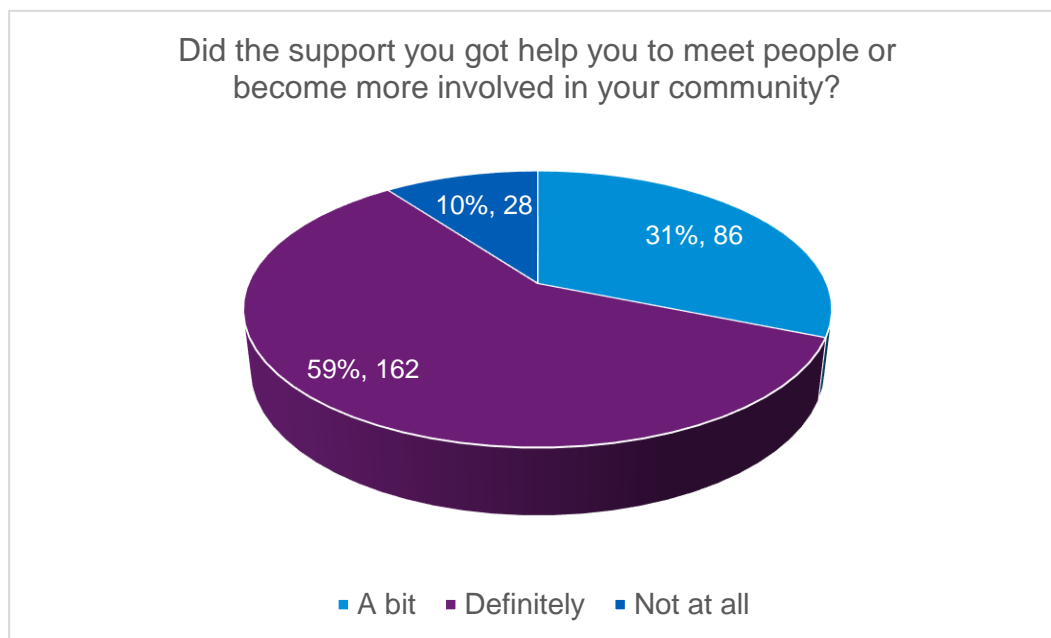
43% (276 individuals) of the 646 participants to the online survey sought the support of their Local Development Company or Partnership to meet more people and become more involved in the community (Figure 5.25).

Figure 5.25: Beneficiaries seeking community involvement supports



Overall, as shown in Figure 5.26, the majority (59%) of respondents felt that the support received “definitely” helped them become more involved in the community. Another 31% believed that these supports only helped “a bit”, while 10% stated that the supports were “not at all” helpful. The remainder of this section provides a summary of the reasons cited by respondents who declared themselves satisfied or not satisfied with community involvement supports.

Figure 5.26: Satisfaction with community involvement supports

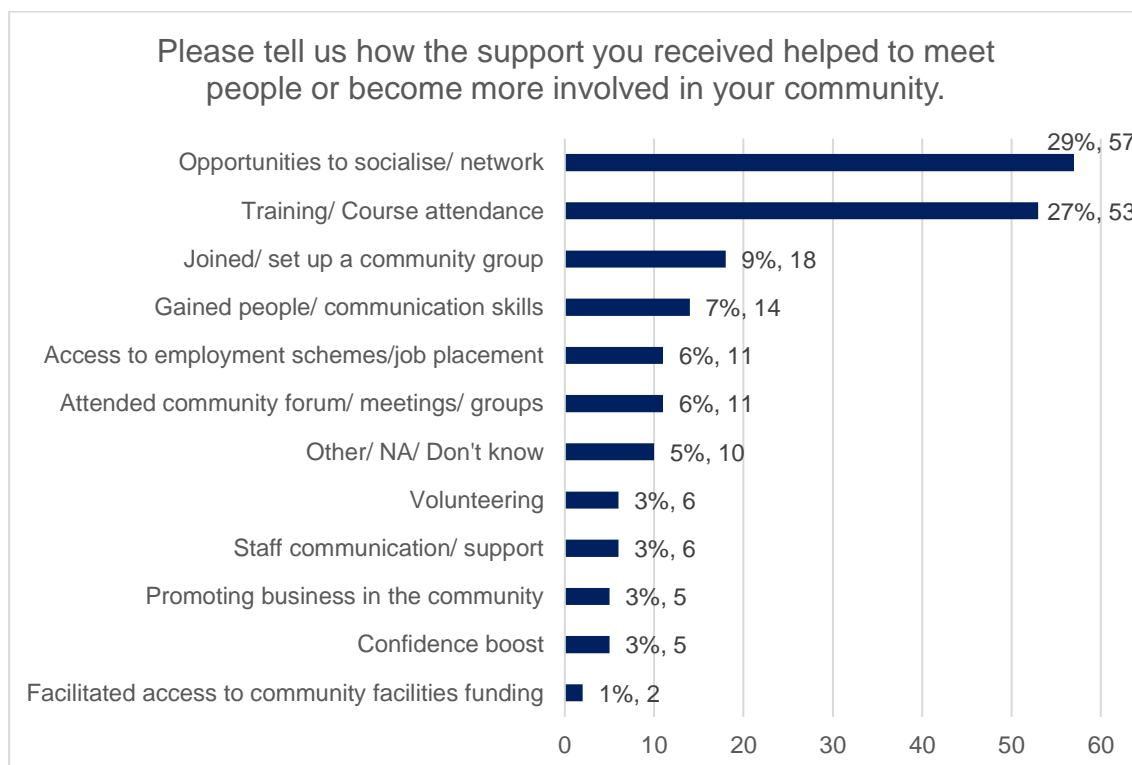


What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Figure 5.27 shows the reasons for satisfaction provided by respondents who believed that the support received helped them become more involved in the community¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁸ Results pooled from the following survey questions: “Please tell us how the support you received helped to meet people or become more involved in your community.” and “Please tell us how the support you received helped **a bit** to meet people or become more involved in your community.” Answers to both questions were pooled together as they were very similar (i.e., generally, respondents did not include any reasons why the support they received only helped a bit as opposed to helping them fully to meet more people or become more involved in the community). As part of their answers to the second question mentioned above, three respondents evaluated the support received as insufficient. These responses were added to the ‘Other’ category.

Figure 5.27: Supports enabling community involvement



Almost one third (29%) of the respondents who aimed to become more involved in the community were satisfied that they had been offered numerous opportunities to socialise and network, meet like-minded people, and form new friendships. Moreover, 27% of the respondents specified that availing of training opportunities and signing up for courses were effective ways to meet new people, as was access to various employment schemes and job placements (6%).

“I participated in courses in my community, and this afforded me the chance to meet people and feel less isolated”.

“Met different people on the course, engaged with them, became involved.”

“The course I did gave me the opportunity to meet other people.”

A number of respondents pointed to actions involving active citizenship such as joining or setting up a community group (9%), attending community meetings or groups (6%), and volunteering (3%). Others (3%) mentioned that setting up their business and making more local contacts enabled them to be more present in the community. 1% of respondents also highlighted their ability to access funding used for community facilities.

“I met people at the courses, and this led me to getting involved in other activities”.

“Helped me setup a local residence association by providing training and support and resources.”

“We started up a women’s group and learned new skills as well as making new friends.”

“I entered the Young Community Leaders programme and got support to do a community action project.”

“I started volunteering in local charities.”

“I applied for funding for provision of community facilities. This funding helped to provide facilities that benefit the community.”

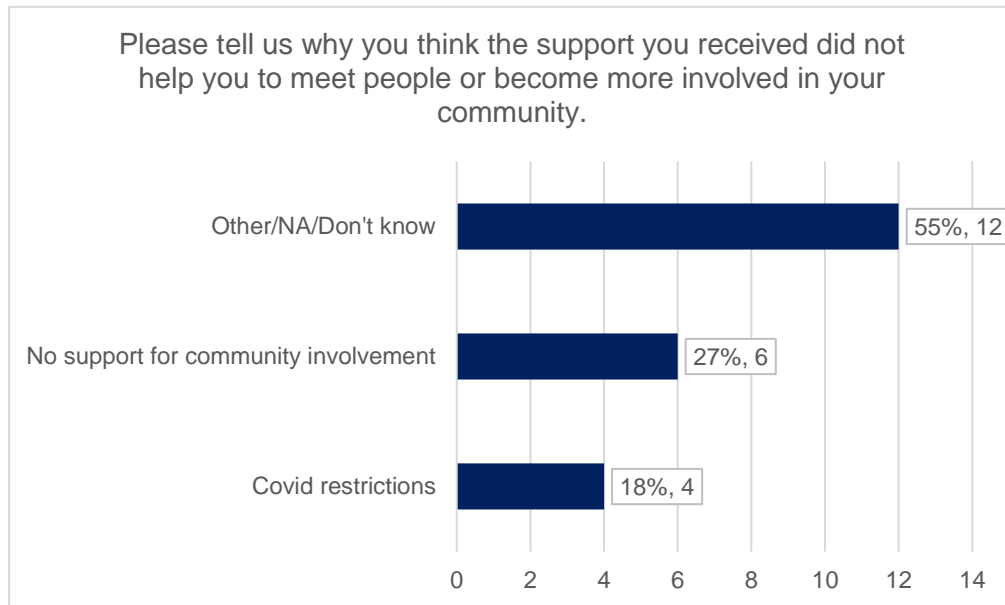
Gaining new knowledge and improving communication skills gave 7% of respondents an incentive to take full advantage of networking opportunities. 3% people mentioned that a confidence boost made them more comfortable with meeting new people, while another 3% credited the support they received from their mentors and support workers for their increased ability to go out and meet people.

“My weekly meetings with Sarah helped build my confidence to go out and meet people and apply for work and college.”

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Figure 5.28 shows the reasons cited by respondents who were not satisfied with the community involvement supports they had received. While the majority (55%) of respondents did not elaborate on their reasons for dissatisfaction, 27% indicated that they had not been offered any support to become more involved in the community or that such supports were unavailable to them. About 18% of respondents cited COVID-19 lockdowns as the main reasons behind their dissatisfaction.

Figure 5.28: Reasons for dissatisfaction with community involvement supports



5.1.1.7 Confidence Building

Almost two thirds (60%, or 385 individuals) of the 646 participants to the online survey had sought the support of their Local Development Company or Partnership to build their confidence (Figure 5.29).

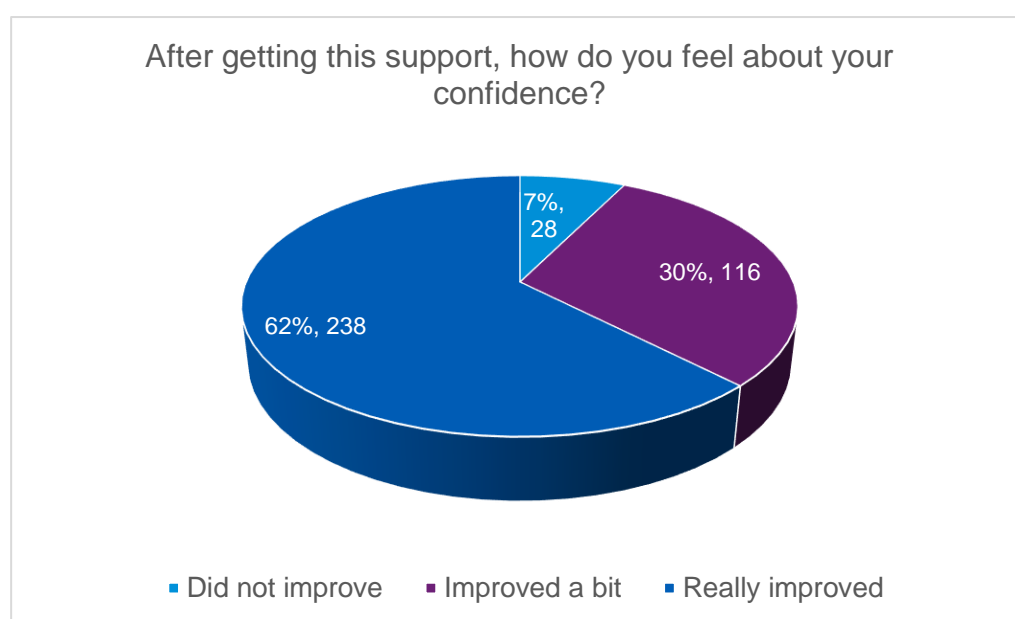
Figure 5.29: Beneficiaries seeking confidence building supports



Overall, as shown in Figure 5.30, almost two thirds (62%) of respondents felt that the support received “really improved” their confidence. Another 30% believed that these

supports only helped to improve their confidence “a bit”, while 7% stated that their confidence did not improve at all. The remainder of this section provides a summary of the reasons cited by respondents who declared themselves satisfied or not satisfied with confidence building supports.

Figure 5.30: Satisfaction with confidence building supports



What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Figure 5.31 shows the reasons for satisfaction provided by respondents who believed that the support received helped them improve their confidence¹⁷⁹. The quality of staff supports was singled out by 16% of the respondents as being key to their ability to feel more confident. Empathy, a person-centred approach, hand holding and guidance through different aspects of accessing and engaging with supports, wrap around supports, holistic model, and mentoring were often mentioned by these respondents.

¹⁷⁹ Results pooled from the following survey questions: “Please tell us how the support you received helped you to feel more confident.” and “Please tell us how the support you received helped you to feel **a bit** more confident.” Answers to both questions were pooled together as they were very similar (i.e., generally, respondents did not include any reasons why the support they received only helped a bit as opposed to helping them fully to meet more people or become more involved in the community). As part of their answers to the second question mentioned above, six respondents evaluated the support received as insufficient. These responses were added to the ‘Other’ category.

“For me personally it was the human touch of someone listening to my personal circumstances over the phone and realising the pressure I was under. But also seeing the potential I had. They took the pressure off me by making the appointments for me to go where I needed to go to get the information or the training I needed. They also found out what suited me best to give me the confidence to get the training so I could work towards getting the job I really want to do. The course I’m starting in September has a lot of homework that I need computer skills for and I had none. But now I have some training, so it won’t be so daunting or terrifying for me.”

“The Facilitators’ natural empathy and person-centred approach, their congruence, their willingness to share their own journeys and their innate abilities to create a safe and open space, where it's ok to recognise and work through, diversity and disparity with dignity. Is quite simply everything. Holistic positive solution focus for those who, in reality, may be firefighting or juggling their everyday lives, they may be struggling and emotionally when you just can't seem to get a break, that takes its toll on one's feelings of own self-worth of capability of. The facilitators of this course, in a no-nonsense manner and focusing firmly on core requirements of great CV's and interview skills, are able to [...].”

Mental health and self-development supports were mentioned by 13% of respondents. Another 12% mentioned that they feel more inclined to speak out in a group or interact with other people. By learning new skills, whether related to job-seeking or of a more general nature, 18% of respondents gained a confidence boost. Being able to focus on continuing their education, getting a job placement, or accessing financial aid also helped about 10% of respondents to build their confidence. Additionally, 7% of participants believed that they had become more sociable and better communicators as a result of attending courses and/or taking part in community events.

“I feel I learned the skills to confidently stand in front of a group to deliver a training course.”

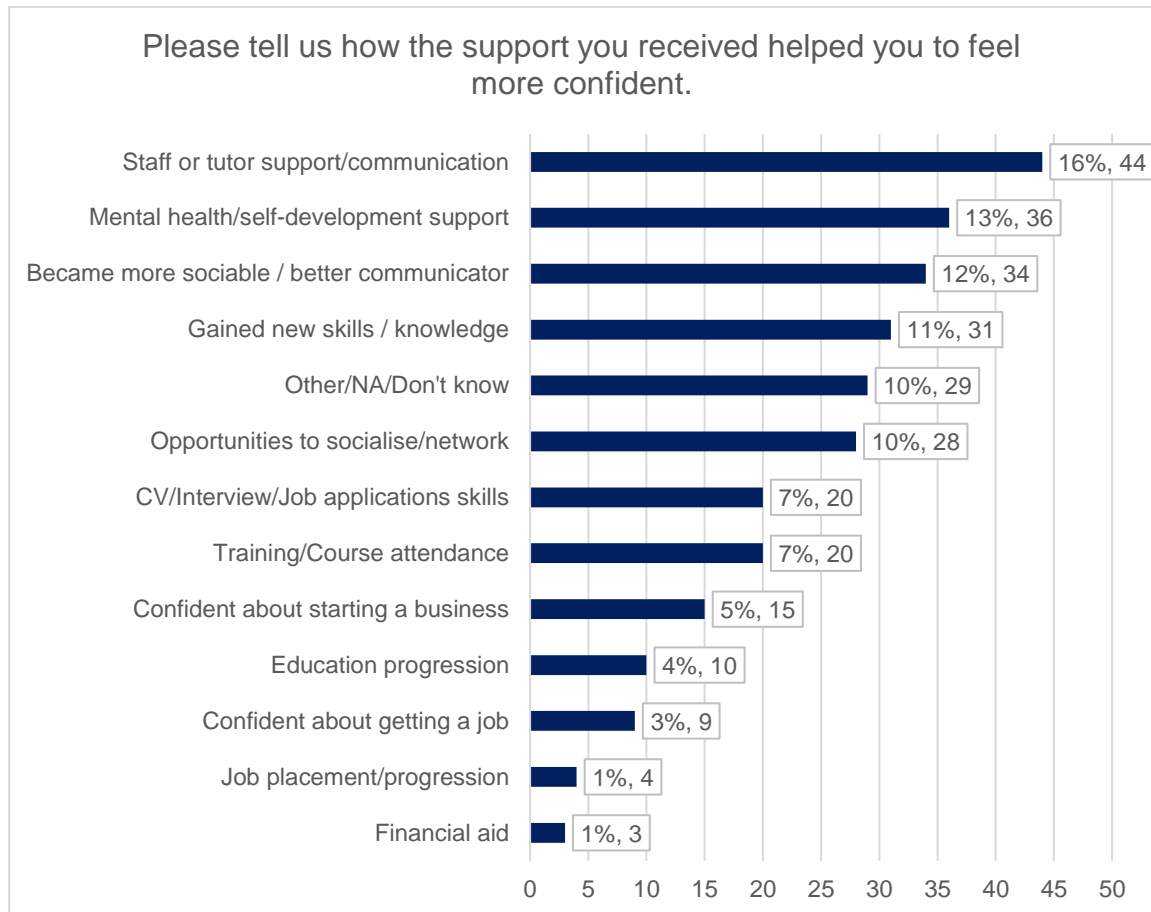
“I feel I can not only participate in activities but have developed leadership skills, networking skills, planning skills that allows me to support community and community groups.”

“I feel more confident about getting a job as I feel I have the qualifications they are looking for.”

“More confident in my abilities, learned new skills, better communication techniques and more confident around people in a working environment.”

“The mentoring was key and the many courses that I was able to attend, such as speaking in public, improving digital skills so I could organise workshops and register with the local Education Training Board and making a video as part of a job application.

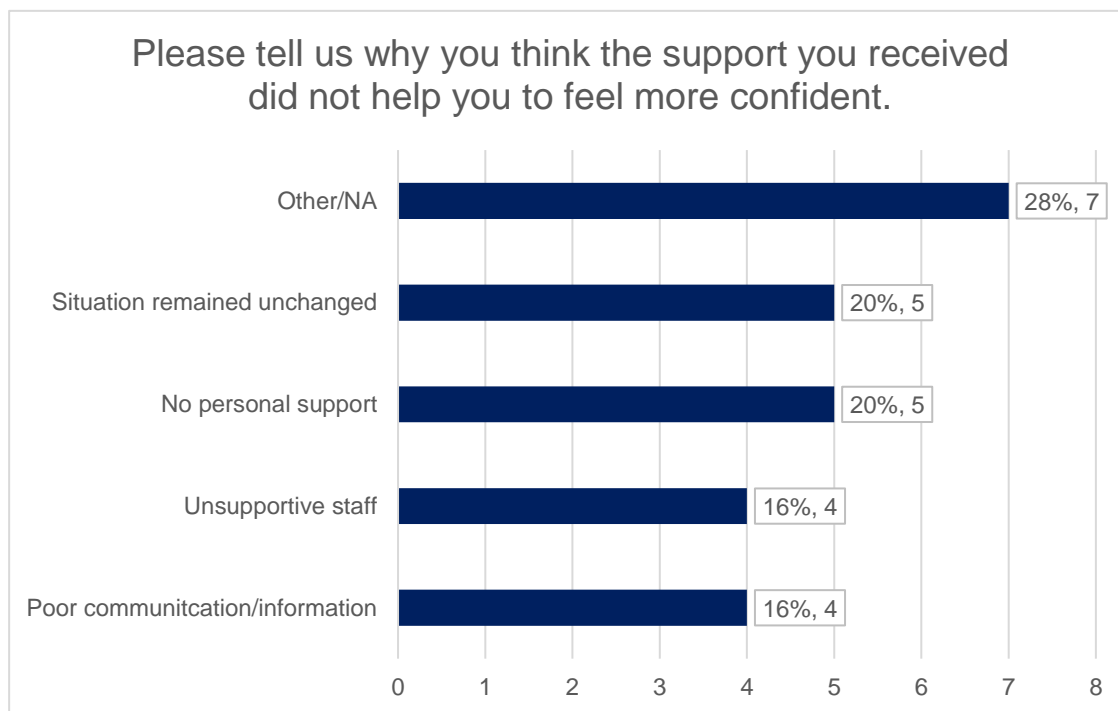
Figure 5.31: Supports enabling confidence building



Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Figure 5.32 shows the reasons cited by respondents who were not satisfied with the confidence building supports they had received. About one third (28%) of respondents either did not elaborate on their reasons for dissatisfaction or cited financial burdens, ineligibility to access supports, or Covid-19 lockdowns. Participants who did not feel that the assistance received helped them build confidence also pointed to the lack of availability of personal supports (20%), unsupportive staff (16%), poor communication or lack of clear information (16%) and the fact that their situation had not changed since accessing these services (20%).

Figure 5.32: Reasons for dissatisfaction with confidence building supports



5.1.1.8 Mental Health / Wellbeing Improvement

Just over one third (38%, or 244 individuals) of the 646 participants to the online survey had sought the support of their Local Development Company or Partnership to improve their mental health or wellbeing (Figure 5.33).

Overall, as shown in Figure 5.34, the majority (56%) of respondents felt that the support received had “really improved” their mental health or wellbeing. Another third (33%) of respondents believed that these supports only helped to improve their mental health “a bit”, while 7% stated that their wellbeing did not improve at all. The remainder of this section provides a summary of the reasons cited by respondents who declared themselves satisfied or not satisfied with mental health or wellbeing supports.

Figure 5.33: Beneficiaries seeking mental health supports

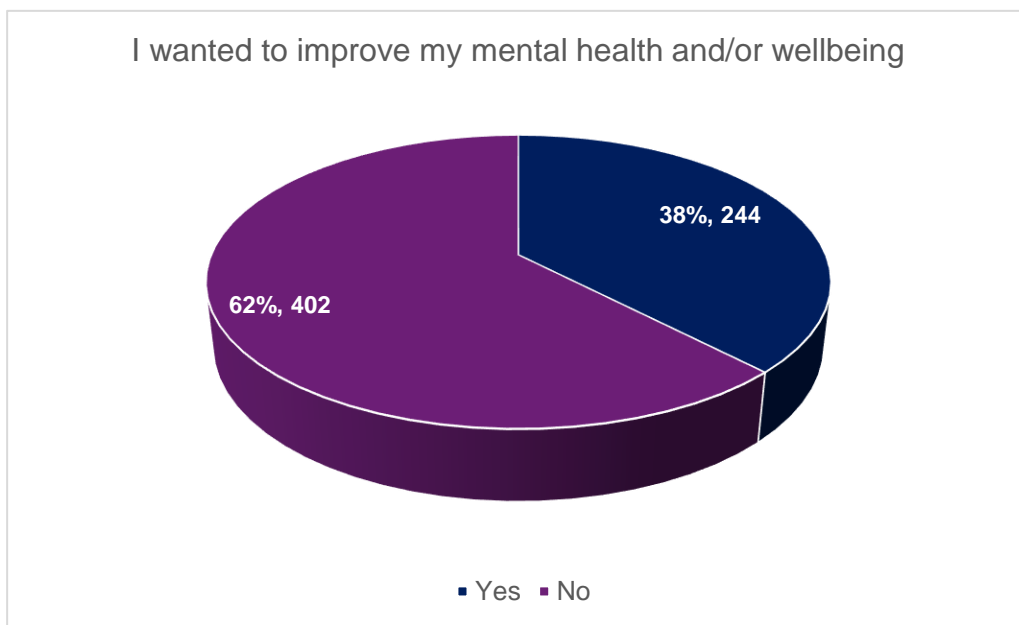
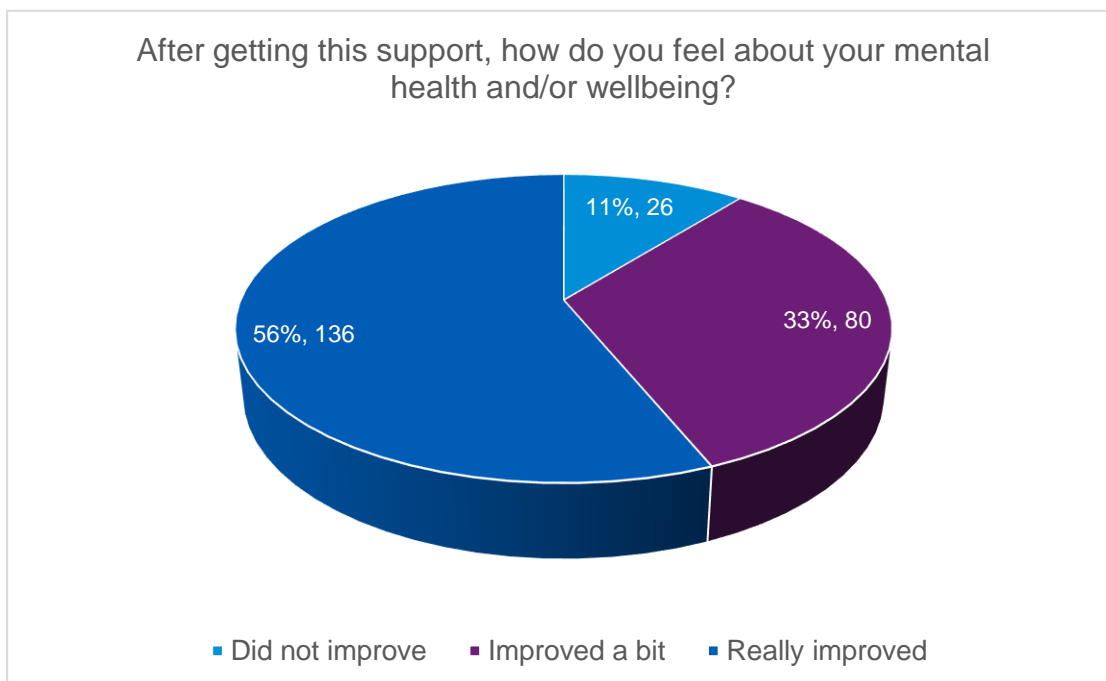


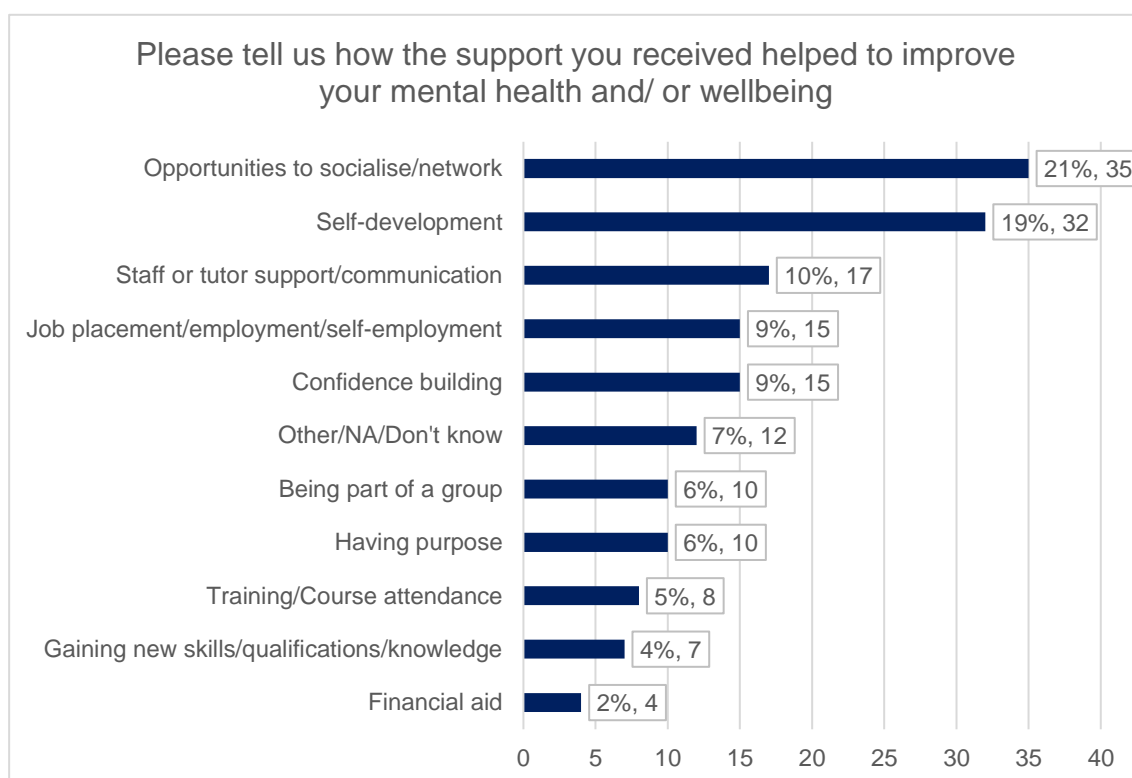
Figure 5.34: Satisfaction with mental health / wellbeing supports



What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Figure 5.35 shows the reasons for satisfaction provided by respondents who believed that the support received helped them improve their mental health or wellbeing¹⁸⁰.

Figure 5.35: Supports leading to improved mental health / wellbeing



Taking full advantage of opportunities to socialise and networking events, a confidence boost, and learning to adopt a positive outlook (as included in Figure 5.35 under the ‘Self-development category) were most frequently associated by respondents with an improvement in mental health and wellbeing. The quality of staff supports was also mentioned by 10% of respondents as being key to improving their mental health and wellbeing. However, there are marked differences among what this experience meant to

¹⁸⁰ Results pooled from the following survey questions: *Please tell us how the support you received helped to improve your mental health and/ or wellbeing.*” and *“Please tell us how the support you received helped **a bit** to improve your mental health and/ or wellbeing.”* Answers to both questions were pooled together as they were very similar (i.e., generally, respondents did not include any reasons why the support they received only helped a bit as opposed to helping them fully to meet more people or become more involved in the community).

different people and the range of services that this category encompasses. The examples below, which detail on what support involved for one individual, include multiple types of support, such as empathy and listening, advice, help with appointment to services, and course referral.

“[W]ith the support I received, it took so much pressure off me, so I didn’t feel alone and slowly but surely, I started building back up my confidence to know I’m not alone and that there is support there for me that I didn’t realise. But that if I didn’t get the support I never would have known.”

“Involvement, support, empathy, and dignity when delivered with congruence and active listening solution focused route is invaluable especially to me right now because my journey is being made so difficult and so impossible and I’m emotionally low and exhausted by it. The encouragement and kindness that Noleen naturally offer during their courses, the inclusiveness, and a place to find self-belief and self-worth again is an approach that really ought to be adopted across the board, it would create a far healthier society. “

About 9% of respondents mentioned that getting a job or starting their own business improved their wellbeing, as did participating to courses (5%), improving their skills (4%), being part of a group (6%), and receiving financial assistance (2%).

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Figure 5.36 shows the reasons cited by respondents who were not satisfied with the confidence building supports they received. About 40% of respondents either did not elaborate on their reasons for dissatisfaction or pointed to unhelpful staff contacts. Just over one third (35%) of the respondents who did not feel that the assistance received helped them improve their mental health or wellbeing pointed to the unavailability of specialised supports or the fact that their situation had not changed since accessing these services. Other respondents (25%) felt that their mental health had deteriorated because of the anxiety and pressure they experienced to move through the system. Note that where some respondents felt that their mental health did not improve, this was predominantly due to factors outside the remit of the programme, such as an inability to provide certain supports without this having a negative impact on welfare benefits.

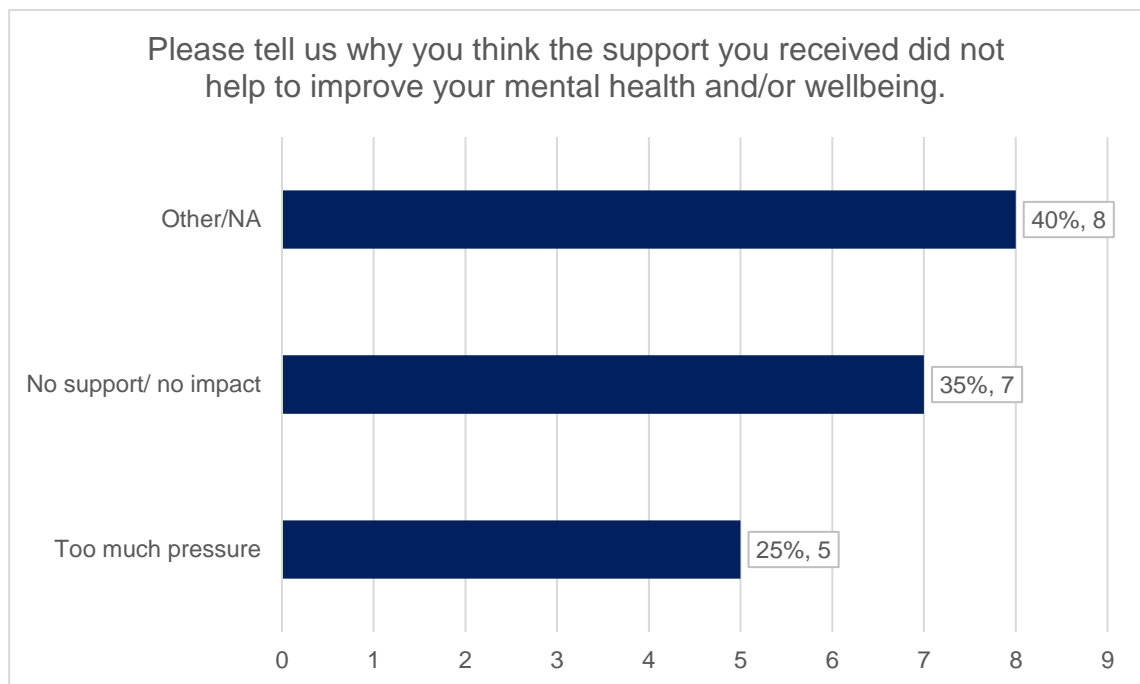
“Still felt overwhelmed by the whole process.”

“The constants calls and emails added to my anxiety.”

“It was a very stressful time (and that’s putting it mildly), being unemployed, desperately scrambling to cobble a business together etc. I asked for help and the scraps I got just made me more stressed, worried, and confused.”

“Honestly, the pressure of risking my welfare if I don't comply has very negatively impacted my mental health, the staff are very friendly, but the system itself feels like its keeping tabs on me and is more focused on getting me off the payments than helping me find work.”

Figure 5.36: Reasons for dissatisfaction with mental health / wellbeing supports



5.1.2 Online Focus Groups

Online focus groups were conducted with consenting individual beneficiaries to delve deeper into the findings of the online survey and explore their individual experience with the programme in more depth. The focus groups were conducted over a three-day period between 30 August – 1 September. Group sizes were set to a maximum of 12 individuals per group and each focus group took place for one hour. Individuals were randomly selected to attend a session based on their availability. Altogether, 34 individuals took part in the online focus groups.

The focus group sessions explored beneficiaries' experience of SICAP and LDC supports and sought recommendations for improving these supports in the future. Several recurring topics of discussion emerged during the discussions. These findings have been thematically grouped and are presented below under the category of positive and negative perceptions and opportunities for change. Given that the strengths and weaknesses of the supports and LDCs are intrinsically linked, they have been considered in unison.

Experience of SICAP and LDC Supports

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Focus group participants singled out the approachability of LDC staff as one of the main enablers of programme delivery. Staff engagement, friendliness, and genuine interest to direct participants to services that best suited their circumstances was highlighted in virtually every single session.

“Social welfare dealt with criteria, whereas my partnership viewed me on a personal level”.

“My LDC helped me to understand the system and took my personal circumstances on board.”

“Listening to what I personally needed”.

“My LDC dealt with me as a human being.”

The wide range of courses on offer, as well as the flexibility of delivery through online, in person, and hybrid means, was highly appreciated, although a need for more specific courses helping with upskilling and mental health was also noted.

“The idea of being able to do a course in the comfort of your own home is great.”

“The courses are vital for reducing feelings of isolation.”

“It is friendly, flexible and they support us.”

Taking advantage of opportunities to socialise and network with people of different backgrounds was seen as key to improving communication skills, build confidence, and feel part of a group. The section below summarises the reoccurring themes and topics that were mentioned by individuals who had a positive experience of SICAP and LDC supports.

“It was great to be with other people who were going through the same thing.”

“The development of friends and social circles are so important through courses/supports that are provided. The social aspect of the courses is huge.”

“The social end of things was very important.”

“The LDC is something special to me. When I be there, I meet different people from different cultures, and we have a good time together”.

“My supports helped me with socialising and getting back into speaking with other people.”

“They helped build my confidence.”

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Among the areas that need improvement, focus groups participants singled out the lack of either online or offline advertising for the courses on offer, as well as any other types of support available.

“Advertising needs a bit of work” – “I don’t know if other people even know what their LDC are doing.”

“We benefited from it, and I would imagine others would benefit if they knew about it (LDC/partnership).”

“Partnership should be engaged more with the community, so people are aware of them”.

“If you sign on the dole you should be provided information on your local partnership.”

“More advertising would bring a lot more people in.”

“Improve awareness of upcoming courses.”

How people find out about courses was seen as a considerable barrier to programme delivery. Word of mouth appeared to be a common way of finding out about courses, which meant that people were always finding out too late about courses that they might have been interested to attend. The programme’s ability to engage with members of new communities of migrants was also discussed, as participants noted the lack of advertisement in foreign languages. In this context, one participant noted that “You need someone who can introduce people to ‘the system’”.

“I wasn’t aware of anything that was on offer from my LDC.”

“It was a friend that told me about it.”

“Improvements on understanding about what is available.”

“If they hadn’t contacted me directly through social welfare, I wouldn’t have known about them”.

“Only for word of mouth I wouldn’t have known.”

The location of courses was flagged as a barrier for participation. Participants noted that getting to courses can be difficult for those who do not own a car. The rising cost of petrol was also noted, as several participants called for a fuel allowance. In terms of

accessibility, the delivery of online courses was also debated, as some participants praising this delivery mode, while others mentioned that it was not ideal for older people.

“If courses could be offered in your local area it would be a lot better.”

“Location can be an issue. And it brings stress.”

“The move to online needs to be supported through courses.”

“Online courses were not ideal for older people.”

While generally praising the wide range of training and upskilling opportunities, focus group members also mentioned the need for making available more courses on mental health.

“More courses on mental health – to gain more experience and more information.”

“More specific courses on mental health and upskill skills you have learned.”

“A need for more specific courses is something I would zone in on.”

Some participants noted the need for more follow up, as they had felt neglected after finishing one course.

“I had to go looking for more after my course finished.”

“The follow on after is important so you are not left out”.

Recommended Changes to SICAP Supports / LDCs

Focus group participants emphasised the need for courses and services to be better advertised to raise awareness and better inform people about their options.

“Let people know about the courses and the rest will fall into place.”

“More notice is important about upcoming courses.”

“Finding out about courses feels to be 50/50. However, word of mouth after an event finishes it common which needs to be addressed.”

Courses to be offered near to the local area where participants reside was also recommended as public transport challenges and the fuel costs were seen by many as a barrier for participation. To address such challenges, many participants advocated for more flexibility in course delivery, such as adding more hybrid, blended, or fully online options.

“Most of the courses in Roscommon are located to the south of the county, while most transport routes run east-west.”

“Location can be an issue. And it brings stress.”

“Length of courses can be issue. Some may only be able to do one hour online but if they had to travel, the time commitment can make it unrealistic.”

“A hybrid model or purely online option for people with childcare commitments, elderly, etc., should be offered.”

“Hybrid needs to be implemented carefully, people who are joining remotely when most are in the room are not as connected with the activities.”

“The different circumstances between mature people changing industry doing a course and someone who is much younger just starting out need to be understood. Might be better for younger people to do in person and mature people might require less guidance and could do fine learning remotely.”

On occasion, participants expressed the need for more specialised courses to be offered to allow for upskilling at different levels.

“A need for more specific courses is something I would zone in on.”

“I would love something more specific.”

“I would like to do more in the field of mental health.”

“More courses on mental health – to gain more experience and more information.”

“More specific courses on mental health and upskill skills you have learned.”

“A preparation workshop for going back to college should be brought it.”

One-on-one interactions were singled out as crucial supports for giving purpose, direction, and increasing confidence and many participants suggested that their frequency should be increased.

“One-on-one supports reduce stress, and you find they treat you with respect”.

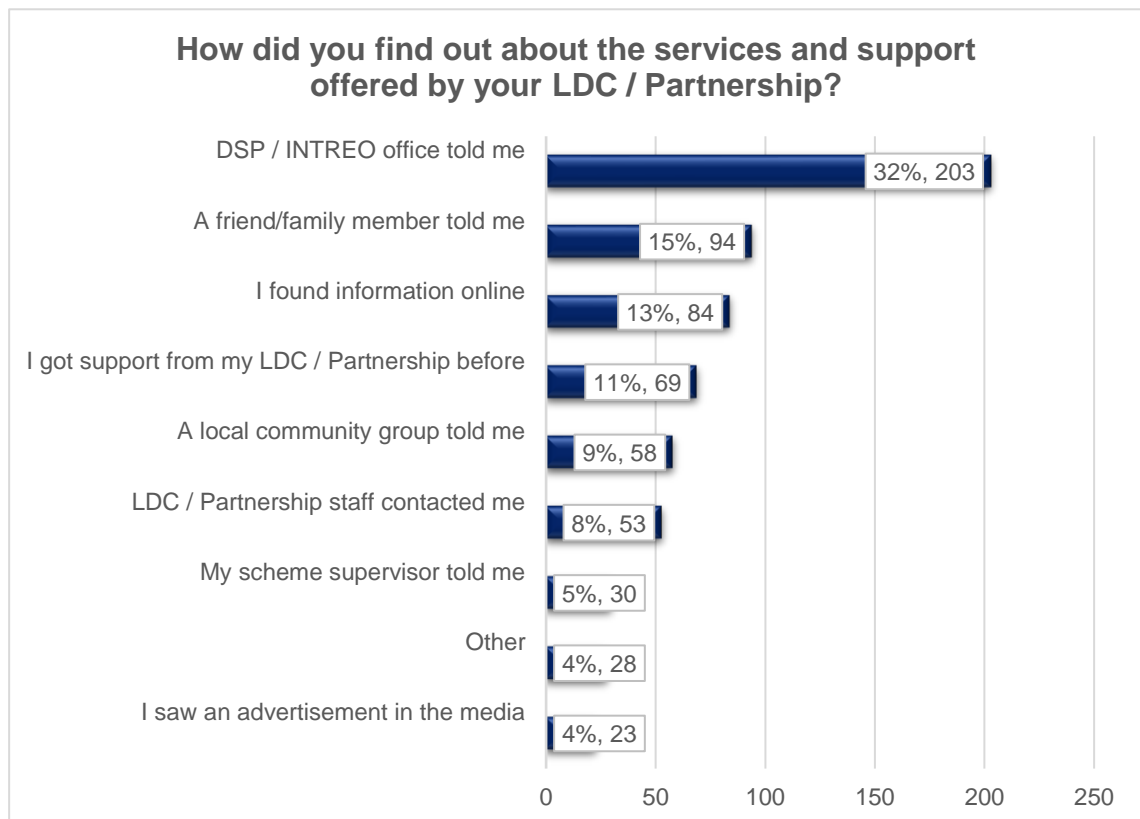
“One to one approach should be step one to help build confidence.”

5.1.3 Focus Area 1 – Targeting

5.1.3.1 Online Survey Results

Data related to how the online survey respondents found out about the services and support offered by their LDC or Partnership are shown in Figure 5.37. Just under one third of the individual beneficiaries consulted found out about the supports available from the Department of Social Protection or the Intreo office. Word of mouth accounted for nearly another third of responses, as people found out about these services from friends and family (15%), a local community group (9%), or their scheme supervisor (5%). Previous knowledge of or direct contacts from LDC / Partnership staff also accounted for 19% of the responses. Only 17% of respondents discovered information online or through media advertisement about available supports. Therefore, to reach people who are not in contact with welfare services or LDC / Partnership offices such as members of new communities, more efforts should be directed towards increasing both offline and online advertisement and outreach activities. This point was also has also brought up by many online survey respondents and focus groups participants.

Figure 5.37: LDC / Partnership Outreach



As described in the previous sections, online survey results indicate that the most solicited and appreciated supports are the holistic, person-centered, wraparound supports, as well as one-to-one engagement, empathy, listening, mentoring, guiding, and supporting people through the process of engaging with and accessing other services. Building confidence and improving mental health and wellbeing are also seen by many respondents as highly important; this is because their situations are often very stressful.

The desire to see more tailored courses made available for a larger pool of beneficiaries was one of the main recommendations resulting from both online survey and focus groups sessions. For example, highly educated respondents complained that none of the courses on offer catered for their upskilling needs. Similarly, beneficiaries aiming to start their own business were looking for niche areas of expertise.

People looking for mental health supports also highlighted their difficulty identifying concrete help in this area. For this reason, more specialised courses and support types were deemed necessary to cover a wider range of beneficiary groups. Additionally, online survey respondents emphasised the significance of advertising current courses on offer and enabling new beneficiaries to identify the services that they require. To ensure wide accessibility, courses should also be made available to local communities through a flexible mode of delivery (i.e., both online and in-person), thereby preventing transportation as a delivery barrier.

5.1.3.2 Online Focus Groups

5.1.4 Focus Area 2 – Monitoring and Outcomes

Online survey and focus groups feedback indicate that the understanding of beneficiary needs, as well as how supports and activities are used in achieving individual goals or programme outcomes could be enhanced. A refinement of current monitoring instruments could be achieved by introducing individual baseline surveys that could better capture beneficiary motivations for engaging with SICAP supports. Annual follow-up or exit surveys could subsequently be used to assess the progress of achieved goals and rate of satisfaction with ongoing supports. Such a survey of beneficiaries would also enable a more detailed understanding of the type of supports that work well (or vice versa) to achieve programme outcomes and address the stated motivations of those engaging with SICAP.

5.2 Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) Consultation

This subsection presents the key insights ascertained from consultations carried out with Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) CEOs and/or their representatives. The findings from these consultations have been analysed and thematically grouped based on perceived importance (with 'importance' ascertained through the frequency around which certain items were raised or highlighted).

SICAP is managed by the LCDCs in each local authority area. Each LCDC agrees annual targets for their area based on local needs. In addition, they can choose to add a target group in their area if deemed necessary.¹⁸¹ LCDCs are independent committees established in each local authority area. Their membership includes:

- elected members of the local authority,
- local authority staff,
- people from public bodies who provide funding to the area,
- people representing local community interests,
- people from the local community, and
- people from publicly funded/supported local development groups.

LCDCs, supported by Local Authorities, manage SICAP funding contracts with Local Development Companies (LDCs).

5.2.1 Online Focus Groups

5.2.1.1 Operational Flexibility

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Discussion around the flexibility of operational budgets to respond to unanticipated circumstances featured heavily in the LCDC consultations. A significant majority of LCDC consultees highlighted the benefit of flexible operational budgets to respond to unanticipated circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian crisis. It was felt that the flexibility of operational budgets was essential to achieve positive outcomes for beneficiaries during the pandemic and in response to the Ukrainian crisis.

¹⁸¹ [Gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie)

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

A sizeable majority of LCDC consultees expressed dissatisfaction with the overall budget for the programme. Specifically, it was felt that increasing costs were not fully reflected in annual budgets. For example, one LCDC consultee stated:

“The costs of running a programme goes up year on year and therefore year on year budget costs should be increased in the following year.”

Within the context of programme budget, it should be noted that the budget for SICAP is set by Government in the national budget. Moreover, it should be noted that although the budget for SICAP was significantly reduced in 2008 following economic recession, it has been increasing but has not yet matched the level seen in 2008.

Correspondingly, a small minority of LCDC consultees highlighted a perception that expectations placed on SICAP implementers can (and have) increased as a result of unanticipated external events such as COVID-19 or the Ukrainian crisis. However, it was felt that budgets do not always reflect the increased expectation.

Although this point was raised by a small minority of LCDC consultees, it should be noted that additional funding was allocated to SICAP in recognition of the response to the Ukrainian crisis to ensure that normal SICAP service delivery could be maintained. For example, an additional €5 million funding was announced on June 1st to support the LDCs through SICAP for the community response to support people arriving from Ukraine.

Perceived budget limitations were discussed by several LCDC consultees in terms of the impact on communities. In particular, a sizeable minority of LCDC consultees suggested that significant shares of budget are allocated to administrative tasks rather than to the community.

This perception was also discussed in terms of the wider ramifications for staff morale [PIs] who may feel disheartened by the perception that greater budget is allocated to administrative tasks than community development work. For example, one LCDC consultee stated:

“One of the LDCs [working with a given LCDC] had very little money going into the community. All the budget was being spent on admin/staffing. SICAP should address this. Money should be going into communities.”

However, it should be noted (and advised by Pobal) that there is a strict percentage of overall funds that can be spent on administrative tasks, and this is audited.

5.2.1.2 Spatial and Lot Considerations

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Discussion also focussed on the utility of the Disadvantaged Area Target and the impact of shifting conceptualisations of urban and rural areas and differing disadvantage across these areas. In particular, it was noted how changes to national housing policies result in disadvantaged individuals residing in areas that are not generally disadvantaged. This, for example, is due to the Housing Assistance Programme (HAP). The HAP can cause disadvantaged individuals to be housed in less disadvantaged areas or emergency hotel accommodation arranged for refugees, asylum seekers, and people experiencing homelessness, concentrating disadvantaged individuals in less disadvantaged areas.

Several LCDC consultees commented on the need for renewed focus on rural dynamics in the next iteration of the programme. The disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by those in rural areas were thought to have been exacerbated during the pandemic. The enhanced focus of the rural and urban divide was perceived to be of critical importance in the next iteration.

A small minority of LCDC consultees advocated for a review of Lot allocation. While some suggested that they would prefer to downsize their Lot allocation, one consultee mentioned they would be open to additional Lot takeover. Although queries relating to a review of Lot allocation were few in number, one consultee encapsulated the sentiment of these select few by querying:

“Will there be any opportunity for LCDCs to review the Lot allocation?”

5.2.1.3 Staff Retention

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

According to LCDC consultees, LDC staff retention and morale were perceived to be considerable threats to the sustainability of the programme. Specifically, several LCDC consultees raised issues that they were hearing from their respective LDCs. In particular, it was noted that LDCs are facing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff because the terms of employment and career development opportunities they can offer within SICAP are “less attractive than those in public service employment, for example HSE, Tusla, Local Authorities and the Education and Training Boards”.

The primary considerations for staff retention can be broadly captured as follows:

- employment security,
- career progression,
- upskilling or training opportunities, and
- perceived limited support options (e.g., mental health supports for staff).

Within this context, LCDC consultees suggested that ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and capacity building for staff needs to be pursued in the next iteration of the programme.

5.2.1.4 Enhancing Collaboration

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

The topic of collaboration and the importance of “healthy working relationships” between LCDCs and implementers featured strongly throughout the consultations with LCDCs. In particular, “healthy working relationships” was noted as being a primary driver to ensure impact for SICAP target groups.

A sizeable majority of LCDC consultees expressed satisfaction with their relationship and channels of communication with their associated LDCs. Specifically, healthy working relationships and clear communication channels were viewed as ways to “overcome administrative/ “nitty gritty” aspects of service provision.”

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

A small minority of LCDC consultees highlighted a perceived lack of trust between LCDCs and LDCs that they believe hindered working relationships. It was suggested that

a key factor contributing to “weaker” relationships (between LCDCs and LDCs) was a lack of clearly defined objectives around remits and roles.

5.2.1.5 Cross-Programme Pollination

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Discussion around the potential overlap of SICAP objectives and that of other comparable programmes (such as LEADER) featured strongly throughout LCDC consultation. LCDC consultees recognised the difficulty associated with monitoring this in practice due to the intertwined nature of programmes with somewhat comparable goals. LCDC consultees highlighted the need to consider the potential for the role of SICAP to be perceived as a “catch all” and “fix all”.

It was acknowledged throughout LCDC consultations that without SICAP, many comparable programmes would cease to exist. The suggestion that SICAP is “looked to as a fix all” was elaborated on and considered within the context of responding to unanticipated issues. As noted by one LCDC consultee:

“[Within SICAP there is] an unyielding demand to address new emerging needs and new targets have emerged.”

5.2.1.6 Enhanced Data Usage

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Discussion around the case study component of the programme featured strongly throughout LCDC consultations. The case studies were perceived as a strength of the programme and was regarded by a significant majority of LCDC consultees as an element that should be retained in the next iteration of the programme.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Potential avenues for enhanced utilisation and dissemination of case studies were noted by a number of LCDC consultees. For example, increased budget, resources, and

supports were recommended in the next iteration of SICAP to enhance the digital dimension and quality of the case studies.

One LCDC consultee commented on the benefit of increased focus on alternative online based case studies, incorporating for example, video/ audio material (which arguably act as a more dynamic resource compared to traditional paper-based versions). However, it was agreed that such a shift would require additional budget, resources and support and would not be appropriate as a one size fits all approach.

Alternatively, a small number of LCDC consultees highlighted the potential for the incorporation of alternative data sources to enhance service delivery. Specifically, the LCDC consultees suggested that Pobal should access inter-departmental data and that enhanced inter-departmental data could be utilised in the next iteration of the programme. This could form a complementary element to potential follow-up surveys with programme beneficiaries (please see Sections 6.9 and 6.12)

5.2.1.7 Funding

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Implications of the co-funding arrangement of SICAP by the European Social Fund (ESF) was discussed by a small minority of LCDC consultees. Specifically, there were concerns amongst some LCDC consultees that the introduction of ESF reporting requirements resulted in “unrealistic demands” due to required modification of established methodologies.

5.2.1.8 Tendering Process

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Regarding the tendering process, varying opinions were raised by a sizeable minority of LCDC consultees. One perspective that was raised was that for-profit organisations should not be able to tender for the programme. Within this context, it was suggested that for profit organisations may not ensure the required level of care and compassion “on the ground”. Moreover, it was suggested that such organisations would likely carry out “box ticking exercises”. However, a small number of LCDC consultees advocated for the incorporation of for-profit service providers to be eligible to bid as PIs.

5.2.2 Focus Area 1 – Targeting

5.2.2.1 Operational Flexibility

As previously outlined in Section 5.2.1.1, discussion around the flexibility of operational budgets to respond to unanticipated circumstances featured heavily in the LCDC consultations. Specifically, LCDC consultees highlighted the benefit of increasing flexibility in order to respond to emerging needs groups in a targeted way (e.g., Ukrainian refugees).

5.2.2.2 HAP and emergency accommodation in targeting

As outlined previously, discussion also focused on the utility of the Disadvantaged Area Target and the impact of shifting conceptualisations of urban and rural areas and differing disadvantage across these areas. In particular, it was noted how changes to national housing policies result in disadvantaged individuals residing in areas that are not generally disadvantaged. This is due to, for example, the Housing Assistance Programme (HAP), which can cause disadvantaged individuals to be housed in less disadvantaged areas, as well as emergency hotel accommodation for refugees, asylum seekers and people experiencing homelessness, which can concentrate disadvantaged individuals in less disadvantaged areas. The Target itself was thus called into question and should be reconsidered, according to the majority of consultees.

5.2.2.3 Pre-development work

Several LCDC consultees commented on the significant work that is being done “on the ground” by SICAP implementers. However, it was noted that there are limitations in the current iteration of SICAP in terms of capturing and monitoring such impacts.

Although greater flexibility from a qualitative perspective was welcomed in the current iteration of the programme, several LCDC consultees highlighted perceived difficulties

associated with capturing impact within the current monitoring framework. The aforementioned difficulties are reflected in the following quotes from LCDC consultees.

“Attempting to monitor this [impact] on the ground can be very difficult.”

“It is difficult to capture the groundwork being completed.”

Discussion around difficulties with capturing impact within each of the LCDC consultations then turned to a broader topic centred on pre-development engagements. Many LCDC consultees highlighted the work that is being carried out by LDCs to build relationships, rapport, and trust with individuals and communities. However, it was suggested that the current structure of the programme does not facilitate this essential pre-development work to be adequately recorded and monitored, and thus, PIs are not incentivised to carry out such engagements. As noted by one consultee:

“Add in greater flexibility to include different metrics so they can gather more information about the work they do on the ground.”

Finally, some LCDC consultees proposed that increased awareness of the outcomes of SICAP would be welcomed in the next iteration. Discussion on this topic focused on the importance of understanding and disseminating the outcomes of the programme. One consultee suggested that it is “difficult to dig into the quality of work on IRIS” and proposed an outcomes awareness endeavour that could be taken “once or twice a year”.

Specifically, it was proposed by an LCDC consultee that a budget could be provided to facilitate increased awareness of SICAP outcomes amongst LCDCs and other key stakeholders. The exact nature and form that such an intervention would take is discussed in Section 6.8. Correspondingly, it was suggested that enhanced awareness of the “types of interventions” and associated outcomes could be achieved through enhanced communication with local representative organisations.

5.2.3 Focus Area 2 – Monitoring and Outcomes

As outlined in Section 5.2.2.3, limitations on the monitoring and capturing of pre-development work within SICAP was perceived to be unsatisfactory in the current iteration of the programme.

5.3 Local Development Company (LDC) Consultation

5.3.1 Online Focus Groups

5.3.2 LDC – CEOs/ Nominated Representatives

As outlined in Section 2.1.2, initial consultation with LDC CEOs/ nominated representatives were carried out in order to ascertain the perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of SICAP in the immediate and future perspective. The findings of these consultations are presented below.

5.3.2.1 Embed Flexibility

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Flexibility in the implementation of SICAP at local level during the COVID pandemic was perceived to be helpful by LDCs in terms of responding to evolving local needs of individuals and communities. The ability to react quickly to emerging needs as they arise was perceived to be a strength of SICAP.

The afforded flexibility was also praised by LDC consultees for its facilitation of enhanced autonomy. Specifically, LDC consultees suggested that the enhanced flexibility enabled rapid responses to challenges as they emerged. Within this context, several LDC consultees suggested that enhanced flexibility and autonomy should be retained in the next iteration of the SICAP. As one LDC consultee stated:

“The flexibility to look at the bigger picture that are beyond the programme targets must be supported.”

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The inadvertent consequences of the flexibility of SICAP were noted by a sizeable minority of LDC consultees. For example, one LDC consultee noted that they felt that they could do more, but for fewer target groups.

“The flexibility in terms of COVID and the Ukrainian crisis is still within the same budget. Therefore, local target groups are impacted.”

It should be noted that during Covid the same target groups received supports but they were just adapted to the COVID context. This was also true in the case of Ukrainian crisis, but significant additional funding was provided for this specific purpose (see Section 5.2.1.1)

Although flexibility in the implementation of SICAP was appreciated by the majority of LDC consultees, a small number of LDC consultees suggested that they had been advocating for enhanced flexibility for many years prior to the pandemic. Hence, a sentiment of dissatisfaction was expressed stemming a feeling of being somewhat overlooked. As expressed by one LDC consultee:

“Flexibility had been asked for, for many years and suddenly with COVID, it came in overnight.

It should be noted COVID was an exceptional circumstance.

5.3.2.2 Enhanced Collaboration

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

A number of LDCs suggested that there was a lack of joined up thinking in the pursuit of more integrated service delivery.

“A lot of the time, we [LDCs] and alternative departments/ agencies/ programmes work with the same people with the same issues. This results in duplication of forms.”

Correspondingly, a sizeable majority of LDC consultees suggested that there is an overfocus on SICAP rather than the service user.

“The service user needs help and LDCs are there to provide help. This overfocus on the issuing programme [SICAP] is not important to the service user. Integrated supports need to emerge. HSE, other departments need to not work in silo.”

Several LDC consultees suggested that the role of LCDCs is not as clearly defined as it could be. Accordingly, ambiguity arises which is perceived to constrain working relationships between LDCs and LCDCs.

“Despite regular attempts on our part [LDC], there remains a limited understanding of how the SICAP works within the LCDC membership. This is despite regular interactive presentations. I feel that the focus and impact of the programme is not always clearly understood.”

For example, one LDC consultee claimed that their respective LCDC was requesting monthly update reports (which were perceived to be labour intensive) on information that was readily available through IRIS. Similar experiences were echoed by several LDC consultees.

5.3.3 Focus Area 1 – Targeting

5.3.3.1 Flexibility to respond to emerging needs

Several LDC consultees highlighted the benefit of the programme in terms of being able to respond spontaneously to the Ukrainian crisis. In particular, the flexibility that was afforded to LDCs facilitated pilot initiatives. The ability to pilot new and innovative initiatives and respond to the needs that emerged was recognised as a unique strength of the programme that should be incorporated into the next iteration.

Within this context, it was noted that appropriate budget and reasonable opportunity for trial and error should be considered. Potential pilot studies and innovative approaches for engagement are further explored in the LDCs – SICAP Practitioner consultation subsection below.

5.3.3.2 Increased collaboration

As outlined in Section 5.3.2.2, several LDC consultees felt that there is a lack of joined up thinking with other government departments. They suggested that increased collaboration should be pursued to ensure more integrated service delivery and enhanced targeting.

5.3.4 Focus Area 2 – Monitoring and Outcomes

The shift from a more quantitative focus to a more mixed (quantitative and qualitative) approach was seen as a great benefit of the current iteration of the programme by LDC consultees. However, LDC consultees advocated for further incorporation of an enhanced focus on measuring programme outcomes.

Alternatively, a number of LDCs noted the influence of fixed targets. In particular, it was noted that “quick wins” were structurally prioritised in the current iteration of the programme with one consultee stating:

“What gets measured gets done.”

5.4 LDC - SICAP Practitioners

As previously outlined, a subsequent consultation was carried out with LDC SICAP practitioners in order to ascertain perceived “effective strategies” for engagement with SICAP target groups (with a particular focus on strategies for engagement with hard-to-reach target groups). Hence, **the findings of the consultation are presented wholly within the context of “Focus Area 1 – Targeting” below.**

5.4.1.1 Collaboration

The topic of collaboration arose throughout the LDC practitioner consultation within various contexts. Broadly speaking, two avenues of collaboration were discussed. Firstly, interagency collaboration (i.e., collaboration between LDCs and representative organisations such as local resident groups, traveller agencies and lone parent agencies etc.). Secondly, local community collaboration (i.e., collaboration with individuals/representatives from local communities, local schools etc.). As such, these two strands of collaboration are considered in the following subsections. Regardless of strand, the vast majority of LDC practitioners alluded to the perception that collaboration is a unique and essential component of SICAP. Furthermore, efforts to preserve and enhance existing collaborative networks should be developed in the next iteration of the programme.

Collaboration - Representative Organisation/ Agency Focus

As previously outlined, inter-agency collaboration was highlighted as a critical component of effective engagement strategies with SICAP target groups. Within this context, collaboration was discussed by several LDCs as their primary strategy for informing engagement and highlighting the needs of the target communities. For example, one consultee stated:

“Collaborative approach is our main strategy. We sit on local interagency forum for the county and on that is reps from a number of Traveller agencies. We identify their needs and voice through that and engage with Traveller groups through the county to identify needs. We benefit from a word-of-mouth experience. We get referral through friends and family after a good experience, and this is an effective strategy.”

Another consultee reiterated the importance of representative agency collaboration and suggested that it provides a “gateway” into the communities of SICAP target groups. Specifically, the consultee stated:

“We partner with a lone parent agency who have the gateway into working with this group. It’s a centre lone parents identify with, and they have a community crèche.

We find this collaboration with partner agencies (through a long-standing trust) is excellent to engage with this target group.”

Finally, interagency collaboration was discussed through the lens of public agencies and bodies, such as local employment/ education and training agencies/organisations. For example, Intreo, local Education Training Boards (ETB), and Local Enterprise Office (LEO). Collaboration with these relevant bodies was perceived to be a crucial component of informed decision making and knowledge sharing. Two LDC consultees stated:

“We have a collaboration with Intreo, ETB, LEO and we meet every quarter and organise regular outreach activities and we meet and share information. We all show up to provide integrated approaches.”

“We try to build relationships through developing creativity or wellbeing workshops. We also offer very short-term courses that will get people into part/full-time employment and then if they want to engage in further education, we support them through that. We do collaboration with local development offices. We also offer open days to let people know what we can do to help them upskill. We might do this with ETBs [in the future].”

Collaboration - Community Focus

Local community collaboration was also discussed in considerable detail by many LDC consultees. It was suggested that synergies can be achieved through collaboration with relevant (as previously discussed) and local community stakeholders. For example, one consultee highlighted the perceived advantage of generating quantitative data on local socio-economic profiles in collaboration with local agencies and validating these findings with qualitative research with local community members. Specifically, the consultee stated:

“We use indirect collaboration to identify gaps. Collaborative interagency work and Local socio-economic profiles are very helpful (i.e., working off facts). After getting all the figures, we balanced the quants by going into areas to do “family fun days” to see if the qual reflects the quant. We spoke to people in the areas to get an understanding of the main issues.”

The aforementioned quote reiterates the importance of independent research carried out by LDCs. Although this topic was discussed in detail previously, the importance of local buy-in and collaboration to ensure its success was not fully discussed. As noted by two LDC consultees, the collaboration with existing/ potential beneficiaries is perceived to be an effective strategy to inform targeting approaches.

“We do specific workshops (welfare to work) specifically with lone parents to see the financial benefits to go back to work. When they see the working family payment that can support them while they are working, it often helps them to avail of this.”

“We have seen exponential growth in a housing area for new communities, we can do deep dives in this area to capture those living in that area (through our own research). The extra support we got through Ukraine means we have a presence in hotels where other new communities may be. We think the Fáilte Isteach is a great way to engage people lightly with conversational English with the intention to get them into further SICAP supports eventually.”

Although collaboration is perceived to be a fundamental component that guides the success of SICAP, the extent to which outcomes of collaboration is recorded and disseminated between key stakeholders was raised by one consultee. Specifically, the consultee suggested that they believe it is difficult to report on collaborative endeavours in the current iteration of the programme.

“We bring agencies and local residents together (anonymously) and subsequently deliver a local newsletter to get speaking to people in the area and empower people by sharing information. It is hard to report back on this in the current SICAP (to capture this type of work)”.

5.4.1.2 Pre-Development Engagement

Sustained physical presence/ visibility in the community was discussed as an essential strategy to engage with target groups at a pre-development stage. LDC consultees suggested that being active and present in the community facilitates relationship and rapport building with particularly hard to reach target groups. For example, LDC consultees stated:

“We have workers in direct provision doing outreach. There has been a new emergency direct provision set up, so we spoke to residents to find out their needs. You can’t not mention Ukrainians, we found out from the county response meetings to find out where Ukrainians families are being put and we go to meet them to support them.”

“We have hubs in the four main towns, and we try to maximise our presence to ensure we are visible.”

“[It is important] The continuity that we are always there and so are the Fáilte Isteach. It’s important for people to know that you are a “go to” in an area.

“The recommendation from within the community to let them know that SICAP is a safe pair of hands is important.”

5.4.1.3 Wrap Around Supports

The term “wrap around supports” was used by the majority of LDC consultees when discussing the importance of a multifaceted/holistic approach to service provision. Several key remarks highlighting the importance of “wrap around supports” are presented below:

“We think the wraparound holistic approach is best. Although the end goal is employment we have to focus on the immediate barriers. We look at each step as progression and it’s important to recognise the steps they are taking. We need to take a holistic approach to ensure they get the services they need.”

“We find long term unemployed need wrap around courses (personal development, literacy safe pass etc.) to support them, and we have a working group within Sligo development company where we work with Tús to reveal how we can support our clients.”

“We look at the needs of Travellers at every level.”

“We use wrap around services for individuals. We are recognised as an organisation that has something to offer the agencies. If we can’t provide a service, it’s important to have the links/ be able to refer them to the right place.”

“Within SICAP there is the follow up to make sure you don’t abandon someone after you build a relationship with someone (6 month / 12 month) also collaborate to help them achieve their goals (and help them seek funding/grants where needed) we have the Tús programme which is very beneficial (if they don’t have the hours to work full time).”

We provide aftercare supports to ensure they can come back for further advice or guidance.”

“We set out what is achievable with our clients and offer appropriate training and upskilling to offer real developmental supports. We look at all the barriers they may encounter and where they are at currently.”

Taken together, the aforementioned quotes highlight the importance of consideration of the multitude of barriers that may face a beneficiary of SICAP. Moreover, it reiterates the importance of developmental supports and the unique progression path that each beneficiary will have.

One LDC consultee articulated the topic and highlighted the importance of SICAP supports in terms its social dynamic for many individuals. The LDC consultee stated:

“Some [beneficiaries] just want training on manual handling (for example). However, for some lone parents or older people or people who have mild disability – a lot of the support is about mental health and social inclusion. A lot of our adult education will see the same people coming back every year. - it can be the reason for people to get out of bed every day.”

5.4.1.4 Enhanced Accessibility

The majority of discussion on targeting strategies focused on the importance of a holistic approach whereby individual/ community needs, outcomes, local factors and infrastructure are taken into account. As articulated by one LDC consultee:

“We need to be creative, we need to take into account access, transport, literacy, language, childcare, so we use a multitude of different approaches.”

Within the context of accessibility, discussion focused on the importance for enhanced consideration of the accessibility dynamic of online, in-person or hybrid approaches of support/service offerings. Several LDC consultees noted the benefit of online supports as a mechanism to reach individuals who may otherwise not be able to engage due to personal circumstances (such as caring responsibilities, financial limitations for transport, anxiety/reluctance to attend in-person settings). Critical points made by four LDC consultees:

“The online aspect in the next iteration is crucial. Some people just prefer doing things online. Some people aren’t mobile. Supports (such as zoom bingo) are very important. The ongoing social inclusion aspect is so important.”

“I think we should acknowledge that online works better for some people and allows them access. For example, it takes the childcare aspect out of engagement and speaking with people.”

“We have a mix of people who want 1 to 1 and online engagements, we also have a large number of people who have anxiety with regard to meeting in groups.”

“The move online reduced the childcare barrier and transport barrier. Some people have engaged with us, and childcare and transport were previously a barrier for them [before moving online].”

Although the move to online was perceived to be an effective strategy through which LDC practitioners could engage with hard-to-reach groups, many LDC consultees acknowledged the limitations of online approaches (such as capacity/ skills, broadband access). Specifically, LDC consultees noted the potential risk of widening the digital divide and between individuals and communities. Furthermore, a small

number of LDC consultees noted that enhanced effort to capture the “time needed help people move online” should be further integrated into the next iteration of the programme. As noted by one LDC consultee:

“We find the staff do a lot of capacity building to facilitate online (but it’s important to tease through broadband access and laptop facilities) – these types of interventions need to be counted in the next iteration. Time needs to be counted in terms of helping people move online.”

Despite contrary perspective on the benefit/ limitations of online approaches (in terms of accessibility) several LDC consultees highlighted the approaches that they took to ensure that individuals are equipped with the skills and technological devices to engage with online supports. Examples presented by LDC consultees are outlined below.

“We use targeted approaches through workshops – last year we offered each participant a tablet to address the digital divide so they could do their career focused training.”

“Having the laptop loan scheme has been excellent.”

“We have laptops and paper and printers available for job seeking skills. We try to ensure visits are not wasted by building a proper day for them (going to DSP office and we bring them to us as well for a meeting).”

“We dropped off materials and worked with parents who have kids at home all day (through WhatsApp group) to support parents.”

Discussion on digital considerations developed to consider the importance of location within the context of support offerings. Specifically, it was noted by LDC consultees that positioning supports in proximity with schools was an effective way to engage with parents from hard-to-reach target groups while reducing travel burden at the same time. As noted by one LDC consultee:

“We ran a programme specifically to update the IT skills of parents in schools (located close to disadvantaged areas) we ensured the computer room was close to the school. Give people a reason to engage with you and let them know that you are not just there to tell them what to do. Start with a listening ear. We also have creche facilities.”

The aforementioned holistic approach to accessibility was further discussed in terms of childcare considerations and infrastructure considerations (such as wheelchair accessibility). As noted by three LDC consultees:

“We are cognisant of their needs [dedicated women’s programme] with regard to the times of meetings. We hold them [meetings] in the mornings and not during school holidays, some online.”

“We also have our own crèche to build relationships.”

“We run meetings at accessible premises.”

The adaption of content for enhanced accessibility was discussed by one consultee who highlighted the benefit of a collaboration their LDC undertook with JP Morgan. Specifically, the LDC consultee stated:

“We ran a budgeting course (money makes sense courses) with JP Morgan and are adapting that course content for people with intellectual disabilities. This ability to adapt should be held on in the next iteration.”

Finally, accessibility was considered within the context of cultural and language barriers. Several LDC consultees noted the importance of enhanced language considerations within the next iteration of the programme, specifically when engaging with Roma and asylum seekers. A number of LDC consultees suggested that offering supports/ courses in various languages is a worthy undertaking to engage with hard-to-reach target groups. One LDC consultee noted:

“We offer safe pass and HACCP (recently in Arabic and Slovakian) to engage with harder to reach groups in our area.”

5.4.1.5 Target Group Champions

The utilisation of Target Group Champions by SICAP implementing organisations was perceived to be an effective strategy to engage with wider members of the community. The benefit Target Group Champions was highlighted by a sizeable majority of LDC consultees in terms its ability to achieve enhanced outreach, targeting individuals within the community. In addition, LDC consultees highlight the benefit of this strategy in terms of enhanced representation, reduced barriers to engagement, and increased awareness in the community.

A variety of LDC consultee quotes highlighting the perceived importance of Target Group Champions (from the perspective of beneficiary involvement/ participation in engagements/ service provision) are presented below.

“Having Traveller colleagues is great for long term progression and engagement. It can only strengthen participation.”

“We find that SICAP can support other programmes and we find having target groups as part of staff very beneficial as we can then utilise SICAP.”

“A key aspect of working with Roma is language. We employed someone who spoke Slovakian so we can communicate with them in terms of celebrating international Roma day and the history of Roma. Early on it was first about finding out who they are. We found bringing in someone who spoke the language was a breakthrough.”

“We have our participants involved in how the SICAP programme group is structured and delivered.”

“We have a number of different groups (target groups) who we consult with (in all stages of our planning activities) - From planning, review to implementation stage.”

The topic of Target Group Champions was also discussed within the context of engaging members of the Traveller community, specifically, for primary health care projects. One LDC consultee highlighted the benefit that they experienced through the utilisation of Target Group Champions from the Traveller community to enhance engagement with the Traveller community. This approach was perceived to be particularly effective in terms of engaging with and targeting other members of the Traveller community as it leveraged existing relationships, rapport, and trust. As stated by the consultee:

“We have 5 primary health care workers who are Travellers who help go out and find out what the needs are.”

5.4.1.6 Culture and Art

As previously noted, cultural considerations were discussed by a number of LDC consultees as an effective engagement strategy to promote social inclusion and engage with hard-to-reach target groups.

LDC consultees discussed the benefit they have experienced through enhanced celebration of culture and art. Specifically, cultural celebrations such as Pride events,

awareness campaigns and sports have been highlighted as effective strategies to promote social inclusion. As noted by three LDC consultees:

“We use cultural events to bring people together and an “our story so far” publication with new communities to look at how they ended up coming to [Carlow]. We use it in schools to make people aware that these are people living in our communities.”

“[When] Working with Roma, you need to be creative. We find that with Roma, they are so hard to reach (especially post covid) so we have to think how we can invite the whole family to events. We have to build up trust (through family approaches).”

“We have direct engagement [with hard-to-reach target groups] as well as hosting Traveller pride events and art exhibitions that Travellers would have made beautiful pieces through knitting or woodwork etc. We also supported a Traveller social enterprise through millinery and hair pieces for wedding. We also utilise gardening and cultural integration with Traveller and direct provision residents which are all positive.”

As noted by the previous LDC consultee quote, the use of art has also been acknowledged as a way of promoting social inclusion and increasing awareness of the diversity of backgrounds in local communities. As further noted by one LDC consultee:

“We developed an art mural with flags for each country. It was an involved piece for kids and adults.”

The importance of the intersection between arts, culture, and children was emphasised. Illustrated and encapsulated by one consultee who outlined an innovative approach whereby they coordinated a collaboration with their local council and the sports council to involve children in direct provision with the GAA.

Finally, language classes such as Fáilte Isteach were noted by many LDC consultees as an effective strategy to bring hard to reach individuals together to provide free language classes in order to “help integrate them into the community”. To enhance this experience, one consultee highlighted the benefit of utilising “guest speakers” from the community in order to expose individuals to Irish culture and familiarise individuals with supports representatives (such as An Garda Síochána). Specifically, the consultee stated:

“We also do the Fáilte Isteach. It is voluntary led, and we have 10-15 volunteers who teach English casually and helps integrate them into the community. One night we brought an Irish speaker in or the guards in. We find the volunteers bring people shopping or say hi to them in the community to make them feel welcome.”

5.4.1.7 Employer Engagement

As highlighted in the previous example, engagement and familiarisation with individuals and representatives in the community are essential to promoting social inclusion and reducing barriers. The importance of guest speakers to promote social inclusion has been identified and discussed within the context of Men's sheds for several years.¹⁸²

Within the LDC consultations, guest speakers from local employers were perceived to be an effective approach to retaining and reducing fear of individuals from hard-to-reach target groups with SICAP supports. As noted by two LDC consultees:

"We do a lot of bespoke employer courses (free for employers) and we research the employer and the job specs. We fill that course with majority long term unemployed. Throughout the course, they meet employers which reduces fear and anxiety. We agree with employers that everyone that finishes the course is guaranteed an interview."

"[Bespoke employer courses] takes the fear out of people who have been out of employment for years. They understand the goal of the employer and know where they are going. They do onsite visits and get an understanding of where their skills will be applied. We find this extremely successful."

Similarly, employment fairs, which bring together employers and potential employees from SICAP, were highlighted as an effective strategy to reduce fear and were perceived by LDC consultees to positively impact completion rates of courses.

5.4.1.8 Mental Health

Within the context of LDC practitioners, mental and physical health was discussed. A small number of LDC consultees highlighted the high levels of depression and suicide within the communities they work with. Specifically, one LDC consultee stated:

"We have recognised a high level of depression and suicide, so we work with men's groups under SICAP to support that."

Moreover, one LDC consultee noted the benefit of offering anxiety packs to individuals they work with in an attempt to reduce the stress. Specifically, the LDC consultee stated:

"We also offer anxiety packs, including stress balls and journals."

¹⁸² Cordier, R. and Wilson, N.J., 2014. Community-based Men's Sheds: promoting male health, wellbeing and social inclusion in an international context. *Health promotion international*, 29(3), pp.483-493.

Although mental health considerations featured in most stakeholder consultations, the topic of physical health featured to a lesser extent. However, within the consultation a sizeable minority of LDC consultees highlighted the importance of physical health supports/ initiatives they have facilitated through SICAP for the local communities and for individuals from hard-to-reach target groups. For example, one LDC consultee outlined a women's circle they developed around new communities and how they coordinated with the Marie Keating Foundation to provide a health roadshow where breast checks were provided. Specifically, the LDC consultee stated:

“We developed women's circles around new communities and a health roadshow where we facilities breast checks for women.”

Correspondingly, another LDC consultee outlined a primary health care project that they established which focuses on health services for members of the Traveller community:

“We have a primary health care project specifically for Travellers.”

5.4.1.9 Research

Independent research featured as a common theme throughout the LDC practitioner consultations. Specifically, LDC consultees noted the importance of carrying out local research to inform engagements/ identify the needs of target groups in the community. LDC consultees provided a variety of approaches to research that they conduct to enhance awareness of the needs in their communities. For example, LDC consultees stated:

“We are currently working with all agencies to do a consultation piece to identify gaps in provision. We hold meetings with target groups (direct consultations) to understand their needs and we have individuals on target groups sitting on inter agencies.”

“We invite participants in for focus groups.”

“We use research pieces to get local specific feedback of the needs in a community.”

“We carried out needs analysis and would engage with interagency groups. We also use survey data (longitudinal data) to understand young people's needs.”

5.4.1.10 Targeted Information and Publicity

Discussion on the strategic approaches to targeted information and publicity highlighted the distinct approaches utilised by LDCs to engage with potential beneficiaries.

For example, a number of LDCs utilised the collaboration with the Department of Social Protection to support engagement with eligible individuals. Alternatively, a sizeable minority of LDC consultees highlighted the importance of language considerations (e.g., foreign languages and the use of plain English) to ensure information accessibility.

Examples of approaches to targeted information and publicity are presented below.

“We do a mail shot through the Department of Social Protection which we find successful.”

“We often link to DSP to disseminate info with them. We link to DSP to send out letters to clients in specific areas to tell them about our upcoming open days.”

“One of the strategies we use, is supporting new communities to form community groups and we support them through that. We support people from new communities to engage with the community through the community radio.”

“We learned that the language and advertising you do is very important. We used goody bags for the kids and collaborated with family resource centres to increase engagement.”

“We share upcoming information with every agency we can.”

“We used newspaper, radio, social media, DSP to recruit. We brought in the right people, did interview skills, brought in employers and did a job match. This has been effective. Some people only want to do the training some people want to go further, and we support that.”

“We drop off leaflets at various sites where new communities are living to work with them closely. Also, we receive people coming in off the street for support.”

The aforementioned LDC consultees quotes highlight the variety of approaches being utilised to engage with individuals within the community. However, as highlighted by the individual beneficiary survey and further validated by the individual consultations, “word of mouth” is perceived to be the most common form of advertising between SICAP beneficiaries. The importance of consideration for “word of mouth” as a form of advertising was discussed in considerable detail by one consultee and is outlined below:

“A lot of the engagement that we do is based on word of mouth. We can target very locally throughout areas that have needs in Dublin city centre. We sit on a lot of different interagency groups in the area to look at the gaps on an ongoing basis.

We have also set up a number of local groups (resident groups etc.) to meet the needs of different communities. Which vary a lot depending on a given street.

Another approach we have is, we look to develop a response from the community itself which often leads on to meeting additional needs/meeting the needs of an overall area/housing complex. We use our history of local community work to get insights into the local community.”

5.4.2 Focus Area 2 – Monitoring and Outcomes

5.4.2.1 Collaboration

As highlighted in Section 5.4.1.1, inter-agency and local community collaboration were perceived to be unique and essential components for ensuring that the needs of SICAP target groups are met. However, the extent to which collaboration is currently facilitated and monitored was felt to be unsatisfactory.

5.4.2.2 Pre-Development Engagement

As highlighted in Section 5.4.1.2, pre-development engagements were perceived to be essential components of engaging with, ensuring positive outcomes for SICAP target groups. However, the extent to which these engagements are monitored and recorded in the current iteration were felt to be unsatisfactory.

5.4.2.3 Research

As highlighted in Section 5.4.1.9, independent research was perceived to be an effective strategy to enhance monitoring of the programme, inform engagements, and identify the needs of target groups in the community.

5.5 Government Department and State Agencies Consultation

5.5.1 Online Survey

As stated previously, five institutions participated to the online survey (DoSP; DoH; DoJ; SOLAS and the ESRI). Where respondents skipped questions, or detail was not provided, additional feedback was sought in the subsequent online focus group.

5.5.1.1 Awareness and Understanding of SICAP

Two questions sought to ascertain the consultees' acquaintance with SICAP. First, they were asked to assess their level of familiarity with the programme. While SOLAS stated that they are "Extremely Familiar", the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Department of Health (DoH) noted that they are "Very Familiar", the Department of Justice (DoJ) indicated that they are "Familiar", and the Department of Social Protection (DoSP) stated that they are "Somewhat Familiar".

Next, consultees were asked how often they engaged with SICAP or SICAP-funded personnel. The DoJ, SOLAS, and the DoH, all indicated that this occurs "occasionally (once every 2-3 months)", while the ESRI engaged "frequently (between 1-3 times a month)". The DoSP stated that they "never" directly engage with SICAP or SICAP-funded personnel.

Only the ESRI provided a response to the question "What has worked well in your engagement with SICAP?", stating that:

"We have found the SICAP teams to provide excellent assistance and engagement during our research projects. They provide excellent assistance to allow us to access the data required to conduct our analysis and engage fully in the process to understanding the research findings and implement any recommended developments.

SICAP pre-employment supports were found to have distinctive features enhancing their work with more marginalised groups, including flexibility, a holistic approach, staff skills and links with other providers/services. The nature of overall SICAP provision is heavily client-led and strongly informed by the kinds of employment available locally.

SICAP beneficiaries interviewed were very positive about the assistance they received, valuing both the one-to-one support and the courses provided. All described a trajectory from low self-confidence to a renewed ability to engage with courses and/or apply for jobs, a pattern they attributed to the ongoing coaching provided by LDC staff."

Respondents were also asked to comment further on the SICAP supports that best align with their work and the areas that should be further prioritised in the next iteration of the Programme. Responses are outlined in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: SICAP Supports Aligning with Department/Agency Work

Respondent	SICAP provides supports in specified areas. Looking at the list below, please select the areas that best align with your work.	Please rank the top three areas of support that you think should be prioritised in the new SICAP including the supports areas you mentioned above.
DoSP	Employment focussed supports.	[Did not complete]
DoH	Personal Development and Wellbeing supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Preventative supports for children and young people. — Lifelong learning supports. — Employment focussed supports.
DoJ	Preventative supports for children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Families who experience socioeconomic disadvantage. — Families and young people who are not currently engaging with mainstream or local targeted services. — Young people who have difficulty engaging with mainstream school curricula and activities.
SOLAS	Lifelong Learning supports.	<p>We selected the most aligned category of Lifelong Learning in relation to FET, however FET also plays a key role in many of these areas, such as Employment Supports and Personal Development and Wellbeing.</p> <p>One of the key strengths of SICAP is its ability to work with individuals most at risk of social exclusion through on-the-ground community development work. This work is vital in ensuring a "first contact" with individuals who may appear to be "hard to reach" for other State services.</p> <p>Therefore, we consider that community development work with local community</p>

Respondent	SICAP provides supports in specified areas. Looking at the list below, please select the areas that best align with your work.	Please rank the top three areas of support that you think should be prioritised in the new SICAP including the supports areas you mentioned above.
		groups that engages in early, or even pre-development work with individuals and groups is key in building the trust and confidence required for individuals to take the next steps in their development journey. The building blocks for this would include preventative supports for children and young people and personals development and wellbeing supports as listed. The work of SICAP staff in networking with local agencies (e.g. ETBs, Intreo, Local Authorities) is also very valuable in providing pathways for individuals.
ESRI	Employment focussed supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Preventative supports for children and young people. — Employment focused supports. — Self-employment/social entrepreneur supports.

All survey respondents agreed that there is potential for collaboration between their work and SICAP in the new iteration of the programme. Specifically, the Departments and Agencies stated the following (See Table 5.3):

Table 5.3: Areas with potential for collaboration with SICAP

Respondent	Could you let us know the areas that there is potential for collaboration?
DoSP	Supporting those most removed from the labour market to move towards participation on an Employment Support Scheme (Tús/CE/RSS)
DoH	Work on reducing health inequalities through the Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme, specifically to address the social determinants of health.
DoJ	Aligning work of Youth Diversion Projects and specialised Youth Justice initiatives funded by DoJ with SICAP, based on local area needs analysis.

SOLAS	Collaboration opportunities are numerous, and we are aware of many existing collaborations locally between FET/ETBs and SICAP/Local Development Companies. Opportunities include referral /transition pathways, course development and recruitment activities (particularly in relation to specific SICAP target groups), local /regional governance collaborations such as through LCDCs, and the upcoming/planned Regional Literacy Coalitions, and other similar local structures. Many FET Programmes are well aligned to support the aims, objectives and target groups of SICAP including Youthreach, BTEI, Adult Literacy, Community Education and Bridging and Foundation Programmes.
ESRI	Collaboration in relation to joint research projects in the areas of barriers to social inclusion, education and employment supports, and community and rural development.

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

All survey respondents identified SICAP supports that aligned with their government or agency work and agreed that there is potential for further collaboration with SICAP in the next iteration of the programme. One of the key programme strengths highlighted is its ability to work with individuals most at risk of social exclusion through on-the ground community development work. This work is vital in ensuring a "first contact" with individuals who may appear to be "hard to reach" for other State services.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus of the survey was centred on collaborative opportunities within the next iteration of SICAP.

5.5.2 Online Focus Groups

Several recurring topics of discussion emerged during the focus group session, which have been thematically grouped below.

5.5.2.1 Awareness and Understanding of SICAP

SICAP operates in a wider context where various government departments, state agencies, and other groups provide supports, including several in relation to community development, education, and employment. Participants largely viewed SICAP as a programme to respond to local needs. Indeed, some government departments noted that they are not directly operating at the local level and thus need organisations at this scale to deliver department policies and objectives. That said, a potential overlap between SICAP and other supports was also highlighted.

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus of the survey was centred on collaborative opportunities within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Some participants felt that the support landscape in Ireland is “complex” and that there are varying levels of awareness and understanding of SICAP’s objectives – distinct from the objectives of other programmes and schemes. Several participants highlighted potential overlap between SICAP and other supports. For example, the Tús Scheme and Rural Social Scheme (RSS) were mentioned as having potential “crossovers”. Indeed, one participant stated that there is a “plethora of strategies seeking the same thing but from a different perspective”.

Furthermore, it was queried how people find out about different supports and how easy or difficult it is to discern differences between different support types. Thus, it was felt that the sources of information – and how coordinated these processes are – would benefit from further examination and enhancement.

5.5.2.2 Developing Synergies and Maximising Efficiency

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

In relation to job supports, one participant referred to Tús as “a good start”. However, they also queried the relationship between SICAP and Tús, while also highlighting that SOLAS apprenticeship programmes have “a potential crossover”. Thus, these potential “relationships” and “crossovers” should be further considered.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

In line with the ‘Awareness and Understanding’ theme, some participants raised the question on whether there is “too much duplication, which adds complexity to the support landscape”. Specifically, one participant felt that the lifelong learning objective “is a bit nebulous as a lot of organisations are doing that”. Thus, it was queried whether a more joined approach could be explored where greater efficiencies could be developed.

5.5.3 Focus Area 1 – Targeting

Respondents were asked to identify which SICAP target groups were among the priority groups for their work. Their responses are summarised in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Government Department and State Agencies Priority Groups

Respondent	Which of the SICAP Target groups are priority groups for your work? (Select all that apply)
DoSP	The Unemployed
DoH	People living in Disadvantaged Communities
DoJ	Disadvantaged Children and Families; Disadvantaged Young People (aged 15 - 24); People living in Disadvantaged Communities; People with Disabilities; Roma; Travellers.
SOLAS	Disadvantaged Children and Families; Disadvantaged Young People (aged 15 - 24); Disadvantaged Women; Lone Parent; Low Income Workers/Households; New Communities; People living in Disadvantaged Communities; People with Disabilities; Roma; Travellers; The Disengaged from the Labour Market (Economically Inactive); the Unemployed;
ESRI	Disadvantaged Children and Families; Disadvantaged Young People (aged 15 - 24); Disadvantaged Women; Lone Parent; Low Income Workers/Households; New Communities; People living in Disadvantaged Communities; People with Disabilities; Roma; Travellers; The Disengaged from the Labour Market (Economically Inactive); the Unemployed;

Respondents were also asked to indicate additional target groups that were of high priority for supports under their work, as summarised in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Additional target groups outside of existing SICAP groups

Respondent	Are there additional target groups, outside of the existing SICAP target groups, that are of high priority for supports under your work?
DoSP	No
DoH	No
DoJ	Yes - Children and young people who have committed an offence or are at risk in relation to becoming involved in criminal activity; Children and young people who are in, or are leaving, state care
SOLAS	Yes - People with Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Skills needs. (See Adult Literacy for Life Strategy)
ESRI	'Disadvantaged Young People aged from 15-29'

The new NEET criteria in the EU is up to age 29. This age cohort also corresponds to the Renewed Youth Guarantee policy.

Disadvantaged People living in independent urban towns

Recent ESRI research, using SICAP data, has shown that the risk of social exclusion (while controlling for many other personal and area characteristics, including area level deprivation) is highest among individuals located in 'independent urban towns' in five of the nine social exclusion categories measured in the data (namely, belonging to a jobless household; jobless household and lone parent; jobless household and person with a disability; jobless household and ethnic minority; and ethnic minority). That is, economic exclusion is more likely in 'independent urban towns' than in any other types of areas. Persons from 'satellite urban towns' and 'cities' also appear to have an elevated exposure to being from a jobless household and lone parenthood combined and lone parenthood in isolation compared to rural areas but not to the same extent as is the impact of living in an 'independent urban town'.

There may be several potential explanations for this finding. Firstly, policy initiatives tend to be defined as either 'urban' or 'rural' with the focus of programmes and policy-related spending tending to be more concentrated according to aspects of both measures i.e., either within cities or highly rural/remote areas. As a consequence, satellite, and urban towns, that fall somewhere between both definitions, tend to be more neglected from a policy perspective which, in turn, raises the incidence of social exclusion in these areas.

Furthermore, some 'independent urban towns' differ from 'satellite urban towns' (as defined by the CSO) based on the proportion who work in a city and as such may be further from cities and thus further from economic opportunities. On the other hand, some 'independent urban towns' are not necessarily further from cities but may have a lack of transport. Our findings showing that rural communities do not suffer to the same extent from social exclusion may also reflect the benefits rural policy has in protecting rural residents from social exclusion. However, distance from economic opportunity, services, access to transport and intergenerational contextual mobility are well documented in the literature as impeding social inclusion and may be impacting 'independent urban towns' in a more pronounced way than 'satellite urban towns'.

Note: We use the new urban/rural indicator from the CSO. For more information, see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-uri/urbanandrurallifeinireland2019/introduction>

Respondents were also asked to indicate additional target groups that they thought should be prioritised in the new iteration of SICAP. Table 5.6 summarises their responses, including the justification provided for the inclusion of additional target groups.

Table 5.6: Top three groups that should be priorities in new SICAP

Respondent	“Please list in order the top three target groups that you think should be prioritised for support in the new SICAP including the additional groups you listed above”	Please explain your answer
DoSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Travellers, — Early school leavers, — Employment Support Scheme participants. 	<p>These are all groups that have specific needs and could benefit with further engagement.</p>
DoH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — People living in Disadvantaged Communities (Children and Families), — Lone parents, — Low Income Workers/Households. 	<p>I think that given the difficulties now emerging with cost-of-living, it could be reasonably anticipated that these groups will be most impacted and require focus. In addition, there is a significant impact for children of poverty over the entire life-course, interventions to mitigate this effect would provide the most significant impact over the long term for the state and for disadvantaged communities.</p>
DoJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Families experiencing multiple disadvantage (economic and social), — Children and young people who have experienced significant trauma, — Children and young people who are not engaging in mainstream or existing community services. 	<p>These three categories appear to cover the main issues which underlie early involvement with the criminal justice system.</p>
SOLAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — People living in Disadvantaged Communities, — People with Disabilities, 	<p>All of the 13 target groups listed are extremely important to focus on, which makes ranking them a difficult and imperfect exercise. It is also important to note that each group is not homogenous and individuals can experience multiple forms of disadvantage, so in this case we</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Disadvantaged Children and Families. 	<p>have tended towards the more generalised categories which could encompass many others, perhaps with the exception of support for people with disabilities, which is also a priority for the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The FET sector plays a key role in promoting inclusion and remains committed to this as outlined in the FET Strategy 2020-2024. It is available in every community and offers learners a pathway to go as far as they wish, regardless of any previous level of education.</p>
ESRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Lone Parents, — Disadvantaged Children and Families, — Disadvantaged Young People aged from 15-29. 	<p>I have prioritised the top three on presence of children, disadvantage and age. Given limited resources, prioritising populations most in need becomes necessary and is important. SICAP aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion through targeted and innovative, locally-led approaches. There is no single targeting method that fits every situation to ensure those most in-need are assisted with priority. Therefore, flexibility is very important in a programme such as SICAP where case workers can professionally assess situations as they arise. Advances in data and ICT also have huge potential in improving the accuracy in targeting those most in need.</p>

5.5.4 Focus Area 2 – Monitoring and Outcomes

Employment Support Impact

While discussing the crossover of employment support programmes, such as SICAP, Tús, and SOLAS, participants considered that their impact (i.e., measurable changes that have taken place as a result of these supports) may be more challenging to understand or measure at a national level if it is difficult to understand “where” benefits are coming from.

Spatial Considerations

Several spatial considerations were highlighted as important by participants, particularly when developing or utilising progress metrics. Participants highlighted that what is

considered “good progress” in one area may not necessarily be considered “good progress” in another. Moreover, rural and urban dynamics may require further exploration. While areas can be “equally disadvantaged”, one participant noted, “the type of disadvantage can be different”. The role of transport is a component that further impacts and “layers disadvantage” according to participants and the aspect should be further detailed in beneficiary data collection methods.

While there used to be a broad consideration of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ areas, participants highlighted that there are now six such CSO classifications, namely cities, satellite urban towns, independent urban towns, rural areas with high urban influence, rural areas with moderate urban influence, and highly rural / remote areas. Recent research by the ESRI, using SICAP data, has shown that the risk of social exclusion (while controlling for many other personal and area characteristics, including area level deprivation) is highest among individuals located in 'independent urban towns' in five of the nine social exclusion categories measured in the data (namely, belonging to a jobless household; jobless household and lone parent; jobless household and person with a disability; jobless household and ethnic minority; and ethnic minority).

Documenting Progression

The final high-level theme discussed was about how progression is documented within SICAP. Some participants felt that, at an individual level, an “education first” approach should be targeted whereby individuals could largely follow a process (where required) of adult literacy programme, then a PLC, and then higher education.

The wider idea of progression to a job being a core metric of success was also queried. Some participants highlighted that a full-time job is neither immediately suitable, nor aspirational for some individuals (for example, those who are carers or who have a disability). Indeed, at a time of full employment, some participants noted that long-term unemployed may indeed be because of other challenges related to confidence, mental health or wellbeing etc. Addressing these aspects are the first step in a longer journey and progress must be recorded in this manner.

5.6 Representative Organisations Consultation

5.6.1 Online Focus Groups

A series of five online focus groups was held to capture the views of the representative organisations. This section presents a thematic overview of the key findings from the phase of the consultation process.

5.6.1.1 Increased Emphasis on Community Development Approach

What is Working Well – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The concept of community development and a need to further enhance its focus within SICAP was discussed in depth. Several participants noted the need to link activities targeted at certain groups with wider intended group outcomes. For example, one participant raised a past activity of flower arranging and queried how this was intended to feed into addressing the overarching goals of SICAP. As per most participants in the focus group, while no issue with the activity itself was highlighted, as it was recognised that such activities can bring people together, the link with an outcome like ‘formation of community groups’ or ‘enhanced leadership skills’ is needed.

Broadly connected to this, there was discussion around exploring an expanded definition of capacity building for communities. An important aspect of capacity building is growing confidence, some noted. There are a myriad of confidence building activities supported under SICAP, the participants agreed. However, they felt that further exploration and categorisation of these activities and their impact would be helpful – including activities around art and cultural expression, something noted as particularly important for many new communities.

5.6.1.2 Promoting Joined-Up Thinking

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

As with previous engagement exercises, there was a feeling among participants of the ‘Representative Organisations’ focus groups that the support landscape in Ireland is “complex” and that there are varying levels of awareness and understanding of SICAP’s objectives – and how joined-up thinking between different agencies and departments can be maximised.

Indeed, participants felt that a clear **definition of what collaboration means in practice** is required. This would seek to ensure that different Government Departments, Agencies, representative organisations, and other bodies are fully clear on what the expectations are around collaborative activities.

The participants noted a difficulty in navigating the plethora of funding streams and state entities involved in supporting citizens on the front line. A sense of fragmentation can be experienced, one participant noted. It was further stated that:

“What is complex does not need to be complicated”.

At times, there is a feeling that collaboration is not effective at present. Specifically, some participants felt that there **may be duplications of effort in recording data**. While it is acknowledged that promoting this joined-up approach is outside of the immediate remit of SICAP, many participants noted the potential role for SICAP in “signposting” for individual citizens for greater clarity around different supports can be achieved.

To address this, it was suggested that further information sharing could be pursued. It is purported that individuals can sometimes be “caught” between supports and find they are not eligible for one support type if they have availed of another. This adds complexity to the process for individuals. In this instance discussion again focussed on the need to develop some type of “one stop shop” for information which showcases relationships between different support programmes.

5.6.1.3 Enhanced Collaboration and Representation

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

A sizeable majority of the participants felt that **SICAP was “competing” with the types of services provided by other organisations** and that this was causing some ill feeling. One participant stated that:

“SICAP is part of a larger scheme. In the wider context, development companies are moving more into social support activities and services that were traditionally part of the family resource centres. They are losing work and competing with development companies. There comes a point that they don’t want to engage as there is no respect anymore”.

Another felt that **SICAP is “pitted against” community-based organisations** rather than pursuing a true partnership approach. One stated that:

“SICAP staff need to sit down with NGOs working with those target groups and have the discussion on how they can work together and how they can refrain from duplicating or displacing the work of the local NGO”.

Enhanced collaboration between target groups and their representative organisations in the design and rollout of SICAP activities and annual plans/programmes of work is thus viewed as critical, according to participants.

5.6.1.4 Outreach and Pre-development Work

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Some Representative Organisation participants noted that SICAP’s early role in collecting data disaggregated by target group has been hugely beneficial in further understanding who accesses the services and what might be required. This information, in turn, can then be used to tailor outreach materials, activities, and programme plans. It can also be used to identify gaps in participation (i.e., underrepresented groups) and plan accordingly. It was advised that this approach be retained, and that the data be used for these purposes. It was also suggested that training of SICAP staff should occur, so that they are “less apprehensive” about asking these questions, and that an emphasis should be put on communicating to the beneficiary about why the data is collected and the positive impact it can have on services in the future.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The role of outreach and targeted pre-development work was also highlighted as critical for engaging key target groups. With specific reference to Travellers and

Roma, it was felt that SICAP needs to adopt a proactive strategy to reach out and engage Travellers and Roma. It was suggested that:

“An open-door policy is not working as Travellers and Roma still constitute a low percentage of both group work and caseload”.

It was thus felt that going “out into the communities and knocking on doors” should be pursued wherever feasible when engaging with the most marginalised groups or with groups that are largely underrepresented in SICAP.

Similarly, the **need for strong community leaders in encouraging further engagement** was also mentioned.

“Leaders emerging from communities and sub communities become members and promote their positive experience in leading others”.

It was also felt that representation of target groups in decision making processes and spaces is very important. One participant noted:

“Communities need to be represented within the board and employees etc. meaningful participation. There are lots of people in minority communities who want to be represented. There should be an emphasis on having people’s voice heard”.

In line with this, some stated that SICAP needs **participative democratic approaches to developing solutions**. This includes meaningful engagement with target groups in designing SICAP activities and supports, so active consultation and co-design of activities and programmes of work are key here.

One participant stated:

“There is an expectation from the programme providers to the implementers that the communities have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process”.

One representative organisation highlighted that:

“Our work involves people experiencing disadvantage or racism as the active agents in making changes they identify to be important. Crucially, it is also based on the premise that policies, programmes and services intended to tackle poverty are much more likely to be efficient and effective if the people who are part of communities affected by poverty and disadvantage are involved in the design and implementation of solutions”.

Moreover, broader questions like “Are women reaching senior level management in LDCs, are they on the boards of LDCs, is their gender balanced” need to be asked; the participant continues: “if not, what are they doing to tackle that”. The participant noted that:

“In Louth, they did a needs analysis with women in the county to inform their approach and response and looked to set up a women’s network in the county”.

5.6.1.5 Embedding Positive Duty Equality Legislation

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Two participants felt that:

“Positive duty equality legislation needs to be embedded into the new programme and looking at the role of SICAP delivery at local level in terms of advocacy, representation and lobbying and influencing change. Issues can’t be isolated”.

It was further highlighted that:

“LCDCs and LDCs need greater awareness of and alignment with national policy and with international human rights and equality obligations in their work – SICAP should be clear that obligations under national policy and strategies are not a question of choice but are requirements and reflect this in the next iteration of SICAP”.

It was also felt that SICAP could be more effective in supporting groups to identify and address key issues and in particular support disadvantaged groups to know and avail of their rights under national strategies and international and national human rights standards e.g. NTRIS, National Action Plan against Racism (NAPAR), Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019-24 (SlandEC), IHREC Act 2014 Public Sector Duty (PSD), and a range of employment, training, health, and education strategies.

Two participants felt that SICAP staff should receive cultural training so that they understand how certain interactions with community members may be perceived as “rude” even though unintentional. It was argued that limited understanding of English language often becomes a significant barrier; significant resources are required to

address communication barrier for these communities. Moreover, SICAP should be underpinned by an “Anti-racism approach – based on the National Action Plan Against Racism - to recognise and support migrants and minority ethnic groups, including Travellers and Roma”, one participant noted.

5.6.1.6 Reduce Employment Focus

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Similar to the discussion presented in the ‘Monitoring Progress’ section, there was a discussion around the pursuit of employment as a perceived primary goal of SICAP. Some participants highlighted that **a full-time job is not immediately suitable nor aspirational for some individuals** (those who are carers or who have a disability, for example). Regarding full-time employment, some participants noted that people unemployed for a while may indeed face other challenges such as confidence, mental health, or wellbeing. Addressing these aspects is the first step in a longer journey. One participant asked:

“If maybe getting a job isn’t the best for an individual (in terms of her best interest) how does that reconcile itself if the LDCs job is to get them a job?”

There was also a feeling that **an education-first approach** to work and careers is more appropriate, because, as one participant noted “low paying part-time jobs are not sustainable jobs in the long term”.

Another participant, reflecting on the perceived emphasis within SICAP on getting people into employment, stated:

“Work can be a solution if it’s a decent paying job, but it’s important to consider is it a job at any cost? Or is it a job that can facilitate women, for example, to gain an income adequacy and continue to provide care if required”.

5.6.1.7 Multiple and Overlapping Disadvantage

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

One individual referred to the “pigeonholing” of beneficiaries – in terms of allocating specific individuals to target groups like “disadvantaged women”. With respect to this particular target group, the individual remarked that:

“SICAP is essentially saying “from our point of view, your gender is your disadvantage” There are different views, some women don’t like to be labelled as disadvantaged. How can gender inequality be better reflected?”

On foot of this, the participant recommended removing this target group from the next iteration of the programme and recommended that the programme should rather capture other forms of ‘disadvantage’ and ‘gender’ “so we can see how needs and disadvantage overlap”.

This point around multiple and overlapping disadvantage was also echoed by other Representative Groups. For example, another participant highlighted that someone who is a Traveller with a disability is more disadvantaged. The ways in which such data are collated and then acted upon requires further consideration, the participants argued.

5.6.1.8 Enhancing Accessibility

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

There was discussion among Representative Group participants around promoting alternative means of engagement – as was pursued during the height of COVID crisis. Specifically, participants noted that there was an opportunity to work remotely during the pandemic to embrace modern technology as a different way of engaging with the client base and “is worth exploring”. This was noted as particularly important for those with

caring responsibilities, lone parents, and for those who live in rural areas with poor public transport options – who may otherwise be discouraged from engaging.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that not everyone has access to a smart phone, laptop etc. and that some may not be as comfortable using these types of technologies. Hence hybrid opportunities, where possible, should be promoted.

In line with this discussion around inclusion and evolving service delivery approaches, it was suggested that further efforts should be made to embed mechanisms like the use of clear print guidelines, text support, and sign language. It was purported that these aspects must be built into online or hybrid engagements and a budget should be allocated for this. The participant noted that accessibility is not always related to disability and the measures could also assist those with literacy challenges and new communities for whom English may not be their first language.

Participants also noted that certain inequalities could become entrenched early-on. Thus, it was considered that further emphasis should be placed on supports for children/young people in order to induce and sustain longer term progress. One attendee stated:

“Lack of investment in early years needs to change: Invest in young people and children and you can save money as an economy”.

While these points may not be fully aligned with the current remit of SICAP, another participant remarked that supports would still be needed for those who did not get necessary supports as a child.

5.6.2 Focus Area 1 – Targeting

The role of outreach was highlighted as critical to targeting SICAP supports. A core element of successful outreach, it was argued, goes into target communities, engagement with pre-development work, building trust and relationships, and engaging members of those communities to support outreach activities.

The importance of ensuring representation of target groups in decision making processes was also made clear, including direct and meaningful engagement in the design of SICAP activities and programmes of work, and ensuring they are represented among SICAP staff, management and governance structures. The need for strong community leaders who can promote their positive experiences of engaging with SICAP was considered significant.

The importance of embedding the Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty in SICAP, as a legal obligation on SICAP implementers, was raised by multiple organisations, including identifying and addressing issues related to discrimination.

There was also a discussion around promoting alternative means of engagement – as was pursued during the height of COVID crisis. Specifically, the ability to use online resources as a different way of engaging with the client base “is worth exploring”, some consultees noted. This is especially relevant for those who may find it difficult to engage in person due to, for example, caring responsibilities or ill health/ disability. However, it was also noted that in-person supports must always remain an option, as many others could be excluded due to digital literacy issues, access to technology, and low-confidence in engaging in an online environment.

5.6.3 Focus Area 2 – Monitoring and Outcomes

The **subject of quantitative output targets and their utility** was discussed by all participants. In many cases, it was highlighted that reaching these output targets seemed to be “more important” than achieving outcomes for beneficiaries or delivering quality community development work. One representative noted that:

“Demand for reaching targets sometimes outstrips the reality of the community development side of the work”.

Furthermore, a small number of participants felt that some LDCs were looking for members of their target group to engage as “a tick box exercise”, to “get their target numbers up”, without providing meaningful support.

Participants highlighted that the impacts of community development work are at the community level, making it difficult to measure in a manner that can be attributed to the programme. Indeed, all agreed that it can be extremely complex to understand exactly how a community development approach impacts participants and the wider community. A sizeable majority felt that a more useful approach could be to **reemphasise the measurement of “outcomes rather than outputs”**- i.e. not just counting the number of individuals engaging, for example, but also noting the quality of that engagement and outcome of the support.

While current metrics, in part, monitor the number of individuals and activities, improvements could be made to **capture the varying levels and intensity of programme activities and interactions**. Intensity measures can relate to the resources allocated to interventions in terms of either time or cost (or both), as well as beneficiaries’ subjective experiences of engagement with the programme and their own perceived soft outcomes due to engagement (e.g., confidence, wellbeing, and skills development).

Participants also emphasised the **relationship between changes at the group level and changes at the individual level** – and queried the extent to which this is (or could be) examined as part of SICAP. One representative asked:

“How do you aggregate the individual change that you’re working on into group or population change?”

The role of case studies was highlighted as useful in demonstrating outcomes and showcasing quality work and approaches. Yet, the Representative Group participants noted that the development of these case studies should have more involvement from target groups.

5.7 Community Development Organisations Consultation

5.7.1 Semi Structured Interviews

5.7.1.1 Awareness and Understanding of SICAP

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

As with other stakeholders, there was a feeling that the **visibility of SICAP should be enhanced in Ireland**. It was noted that LDCs feel that SICAP could and should be:

“as recognisable as other nationally delivered programmes, for instance those programmes delivered by the Local Enterprise Offices or Education and Training Boards”.

It was also felt that the national value of SICAP could be showcased more clearly, with one interviewee commenting that:

“This could be progressed through the identification of the number of programmes and multi-agency fora that are directly supported by SICAP staff and management”.

This would in turn illustrate how many programmes and fora could become unsustainable without SICAP.

5.7.1.2 Administrative Burdens – Role of the ESF Requirements

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The ILDN, in their position paper, note that SICAP currently receives funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020. This programme is designed to provide training courses that would improve unemployed people's ability to gain employment. However, the ILDN felt that:

“It has not fit well with the personal development and progression model that is developed with each SICAP client and results in their Personal Action Plan. A great deal of staff time is used trying to make the monitoring system for PEIL fit with SICAP methodology. ESF funding also requires creating a separate set of paper-based records”.

The position paper further states that:

“LDCs suggest an assessment of the overall contribution that ESF funding makes, taking into account the difficulties encountered in making SICAP actions fit the PEIL design and ESF monitoring requirements”.

Thus, further consideration around how these perceived administrative burdens can be lessened is required.

5.7.1.3 Flexibility and Exploring the Concept of ‘Accountable Autonomy’

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The notion of **enhancing flexibility** within SICAP was a key discussion point among the interviewees – as was the theme of **building greater local autonomy and trust**. The successes of a more flexible approach during the COVID pandemic – and the current

Ukrainian crisis - were referenced, as was the need to further build on this progress rather than “going backwards”.

This approach, the participants noted, could take the form of allowing **for further flexibility in changes to annual plans without “going to the LCDC every time”** (in terms of creating new actions and reallocating resources), conducting **local consultation around the development of targets** (to enhance joint ownership of same), and reducing penalties where possible. It may also necessitate a **review of the SICAP Resource Allocation Model**.

One interviewee referred to the concept of **“accountable autonomy”** and its potential utility within the context of SICAP. The concept was originally developed by political scientist Archon Fung. In essence, and as Fung describes it, it is a “conception of centralised action that counter-intuitively bolsters local capability without improperly and destructively encroaching upon it”.

The notion of autonomy, participants stated, is also reflected in the government’s current strategy for the community and voluntary sector, as follows:

“Autonomy ensures local organisations can be creative, innovative and flexible in responding quickly to issues as they emerge and evolve, supporting approaches that meet the needs of a diverse society and empowering communities to identify and shape responses to their needs.”¹⁸³

Moreover, interviewees discussed the role of cash penalties for not meeting targets, which is something they said “makes individuals feel like a bold child. It’s viewed as a shaming exercise rather than the financial ramifications. It ruins relationships with LCDCs and LDCs”. It was further stated that there is a “recurring pressure that if you don’t hit a KPI it will be frowned upon” regardless of whether the KPI is appropriate for the area or not.

Finally, it was contended that the Resource Allocation Model must also consider future costs associated with providing supports to Ukrainians and the communities hosting them. There was widespread concern that existing programme beneficiaries would experience reduced supports from SICAP due to the reallocation of resources to support this emergency response.

¹⁸³ Department of Rural and Community Development (2019). *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024*, p. 21.

5.7.1.4 Community Development and ‘Non-Linear’ Progress

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centered on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The concept of community development was also discussed in depth in terms of its inherent long-term nature. The CWI noted that “naming community development on paper is not sufficient, and community work needs to be given far more recognition as an underpinning theme” of SICAP. However, it was acknowledged that, “though still not without its flaws”, the second iteration of SICAP was an improvement on the first with some more scope for a community work approach. It was agreed that a deeper understanding of community work is required, including at policy level, for LCDC members, local authorities, and LDC staff and board members. This would support a greater focus on the impact of the work and the importance of measuring the outcomes and impacts for marginalised groups.

Some of those consulted by the CWI felt that “the programme does not facilitate the intensity of the work required and that the work is ‘just skimming the top’ of the deeply rooted social and economic disadvantage experience in many communities”.

Relationship and trust building is key, it was argued, and that this process takes time, and given the pressures of the work, the time is often not available.

It was noted that SICAP currently places an emphasis on facilitating LCGs’ progression along **the community development matrix**, which comprises three stages:

- Stage 1: Pre-development and group formation
- Stage 2: Capacity-building and empowerment
- Stage 3: Strategic involvement in policy and decision-making processes at a local, regional and/or national level

However, one interviewee stated:

“We need to review the SICAP concept of Community Development. It’s a linear progression in SICAP, **this rarely happens in real life.**”

Moreover, it was stated that:

“LDCs find that most community groups want to design and implement actions that improve the quality of life in their community like organising summer camps for children or social events for older people. These activities build confidence within the group, and address needs in their community, but it can be hard to move from those needs to advocacy actions”.

Thus, it was felt that a **revised definition or conceptualisation of community development** could seek to reemphasise ‘**quality of life**’ measures over more ‘issue based’ work around advocacy – as is currently deemed to be the predominant focus.

Finally, discussion moved to how progress is measured within SICAP. One interviewee argued that:

“Different community groups require different amounts of time and resources - thus, the quantity of community groups engaged with is not an appropriate metric. **You can inadvertently incentivise low hanging fruits this way**”.

5.7.1.5 Spatial Considerations

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

Discussion also focussed on the **utility of the Disadvantaged Area Target** and the impact of shifting conceptualisations of urban and rural areas and differing disadvantage across these areas.

The ILDN position paper highlights the following:

“During the delivery period for SICAP 2 several factors have contributed to weaknesses in the Deprivation Index. Amongst these are the Housing Assistance Programme (HAP) and the use of hotels and guest houses for direct provision, homeless hubs, and most recently for accommodating Ukrainians fleeing the war. People who avail of the HAP scheme use it to secure private rented accommodation. Typically, the rented accommodation they find is not in a disadvantaged area”.

In addition, the broader use of the **Deprivation Index in rural areas** was questioned and was referenced as having been “the source of longstanding debate”. Rural

disadvantage, interviewees stated, has never been as concentrated in distinct geographic areas as it has in some urban areas. Moreover, it was noted that:

“The Index does not consider key factors of rural disadvantage such as distance from public and private services, access to employment opportunities, access to transport, poor mobile phone coverage and poor internet access.”

5.7.1.6 Enhancing Innovation

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centered on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The ILDN state in their position paper that

“Local Development Companies have an important role to play in designing and piloting innovative responses to poverty and exclusion. It is an aspect of SICAP that was lost after a substantial budget cut to the programme during the last economic recession almost 15 years ago. The next iteration of SICAP is an ideal time to restore the ability to innovate, but additional funding will be required.”

It is also noted that innovation is an important component of developing effective support strategies (as reflected in the Government’s “Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland” document). However, beyond additional funding, it requires recognition that not all innovative pilots will be successful. Indeed, these are important opportunities for learning. Innovation necessitates reflection on mechanisms which have worked well – but equally requires reflection on what has not worked well.

5.7.1.7 Staff Retention

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

The participants note that LDCs are facing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff because the terms of employment and career development opportunities they can offer within SICAP are “less attractive than those in public service employment, for example HSE, Tusla, Local Authorities and the Education and Training Boards”.

Continuing Professional Development is an important way to help staff in their work to support the evolving needs of target groups, it was noted. Mental health and wellbeing support would also be of benefit to staff who are often dealing with complex situations. Specific budgets could be explored for these items, interviewees suggest.

Moreover, the CWI highlighted that:

“It is essential that those overseeing and implementing the programme have the knowledge and skills required to ensure that a community development approach underpins the work...not everyone has community development skills or qualifications and there is a lack of opportunity for practice development and networking”.

5.7.1.8 New Target Groups

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

The ILDN note that work with vulnerable Older People “came back to the fore during the various public COVID 19 lockdowns and restrictions”. LDCs would like to see the work with this group continue in the next programme and the target group to be named, the interviewee notes. It is further asserted that:

“While the COVID emergency has, hopefully, passed, vulnerable older people continue to face difficulties navigating changes to the delivery of key services where digital literacy is almost essential, and they are particularly at risk during steeply increasing inflation that has already started to impact very significantly on household bills”.

5.7.1.9 Collaboration

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

Collaboration one of the three horizontal themes of SICAP. The CWI highlighted that many participants they consulted with stated that collaboration is a core part of the way they work. This is viewed as a strength of the programme and should be retained and further enhanced.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

However, some have outlined the experience of other organisations/agencies claiming or reporting SICAP work as their own. For some, the ‘cohesion process has left a legacy of mistrust between grassroots organisations and the Partnership’ and the legacy makes it challenging to work collaboratively.

5.7.2 Focus Area 1 – Targeting

As previously alluded to, the Community Development Organisations emphasised the need for further embedding the community development approach within SICAP. Some felt that “the programme does not facilitate the intensity of the work required and that the work is ‘just skimming the top’ of the deeply rooted social and economic disadvantage experience in many communities”. Thus, there was a feeling that targets must be relevant to the local context and that target groups themselves should be involved in designing and implementing the programme.

5.7.3 Focus Area 2 – Monitoring and Outcomes

The reduction in quantitative output targets between the first and second iterations of the programme was considered useful by the Community Development Organisation participants. However, while the number of targets has been reduced, the issues associated with externally set targets persist, it was argued. This relates to national data informing national targets which may not always apply to the same extent in certain locations. The CWI report states that “that there is often pressure to work with particular communities and that this externally applied pressure leads to a top-down approach without the necessary buy-in from the communities themselves”. There was thus a feeling that local development should “never be involved in going into communities and taking over groups”.

Moreover, concern was expressed that the current programme fails to focus on measuring outcomes. Women, for example, make up a significant percentage of those engaged but the extent to which the programme effects gender equality overall and how this is measured was questioned.

The database, IRIS, is still considered to be an issue. The CWI stated that “In some instances, Community Workers themselves are expected to complete the reports on IRIS, whilst in others, there is a dedicated person in the organisation that is responsible”- thus it represents an additional administrative burden for some community workers. In addition, the CWI highlighted their finding that:

“A number of people stated that they tend to input the information required by IRIS but ‘not much more’, which suggests that IRIS is not actually capturing anywhere

near the full extent of the work being undertaken”. Thus, it was felt that ‘IRIS needs to be redesigned to capture the real work’.

Thus, there is a feeling that only requirements will be reported on – with no ‘incentive’ for additional information to be inputted and captured. The CWI report stated that among LDCs:

“While some suggested that not all of the work needs to be reported on, others expressed a concern that the LDC will be seen to be underperforming if they do not report on all the work whilst others were of the view that ‘they don’t care as long as targets are met”.

The report argues that:

“In line with community work principles the focus should be more on outcomes for marginalised communities overall and structural changes brought about as a result of the work rather than changes in individual circumstances alone”.

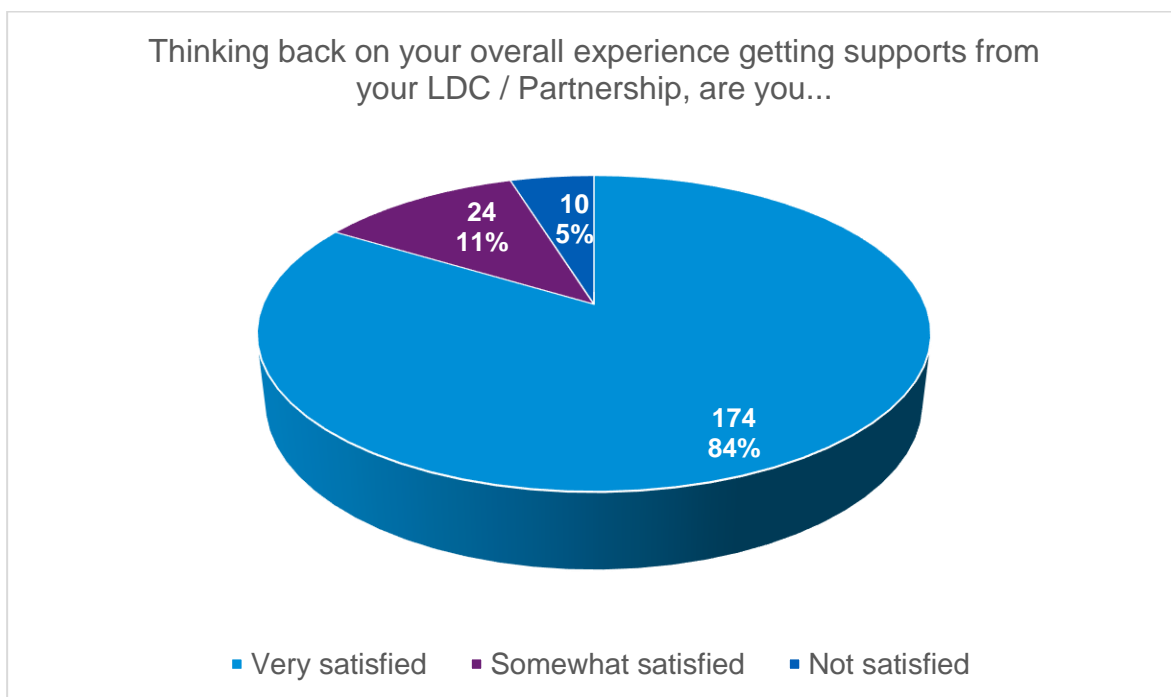
5.8 Local Community Group (LCG) / Social Enterprise Consultation

Local Community Groups (LCGs) and Social Enterprises (SEs) were the focus of this stage of the consultation. This was pursued by means of an online survey. There were 208 responses to this survey, the thematic findings of which are presented below. It should be noted that Section 2.2.4 provides a detailed overview of the composition and background of the respondents.

5.8.1 Online Survey

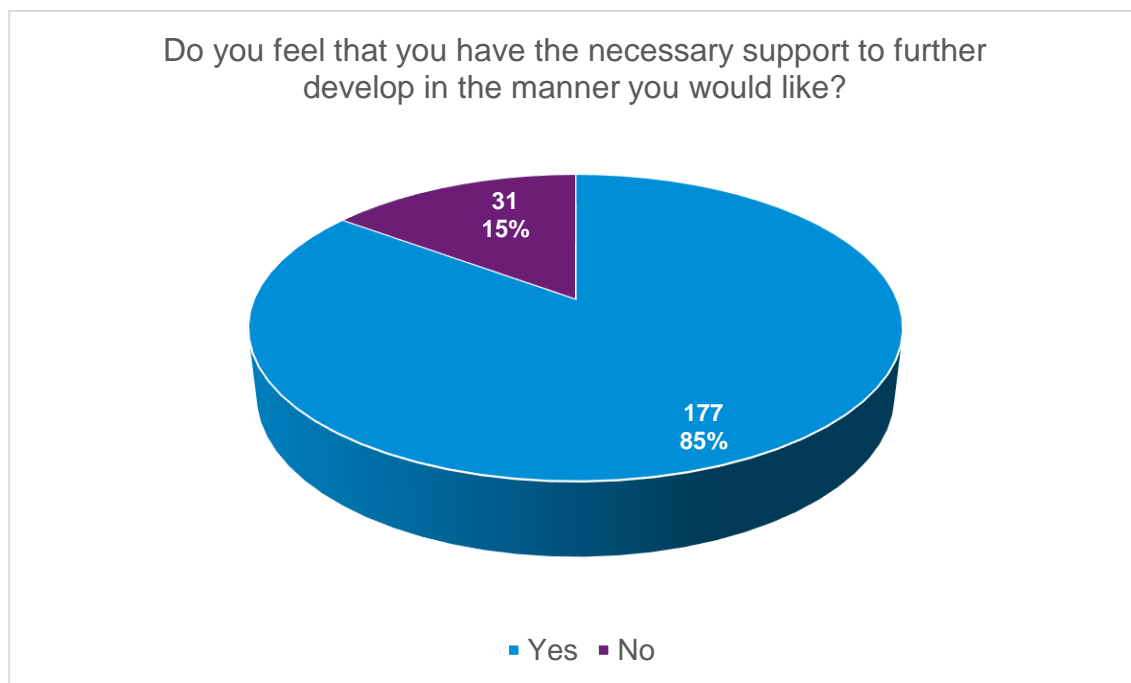
Survey respondents were asked about their experience in getting supports from their Local Development Company or Partnership – and their level of satisfaction. It is important to note that over 83% of respondents reported that they are “very satisfied”. 5% respondents were “not satisfied”, with a further 11.5% indicating that they are “somewhat satisfied”. This is shown in Figure 5.38.

Figure 5.38: Satisfaction with LDC / Partnership supports



In addition, respondents were also asked whether they feel that they have the necessary support to further develop in the manner they would like. Over 85% felt they do have the necessary support, while almost 15% felt otherwise.

Figure 5.39: Confidence in supports



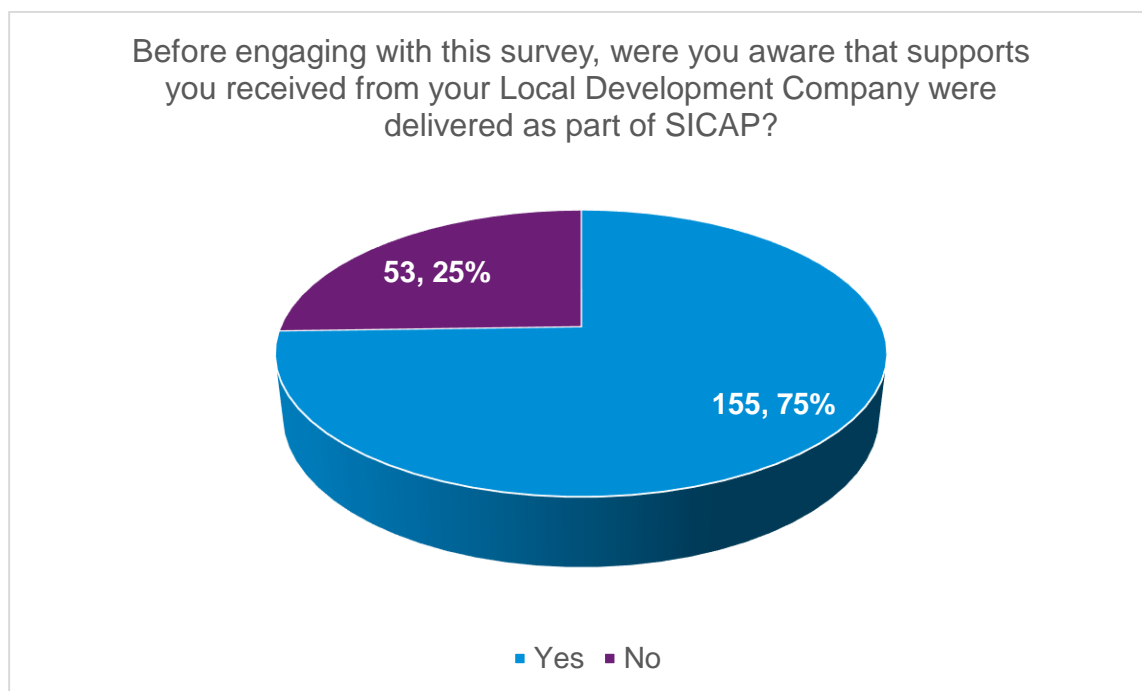
Broader thematic consideration of the reasons behind the responses are considered below. The section also discusses the reasons behind their assertions that they have or do not have the necessary support to further develop in the manner they would like.

5.8.1.1 Awareness and Understanding of SICAP

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

As with previously set out feedback, respondents felt that there was a need to enhance the processes and systems for sourcing information around SICAP. It is interesting to note that 25% of survey respondents were not aware that supports they had received from their Local Development Company were delivered as part of SICAP. There was also an overall sense of 'fragmentation' across the support landscape which should be further streamlined, many consultees noted. One respondent stated that the structure of SICAP service provision in a city centre area "makes it difficult to understand" about the exactly support they provide.

Figure 5.40: Awareness of SICAP supports



Moreover, one respondent noted:

“As there is no website there is no way to find out how what services are offered or how we can work with the organisation. As the biggest voluntary group in the area, it's disappointing that no support has been forthcoming. There is no transparency to where funding is going in the area”.

Another stated that:

“While the local Partnership is woefully inept in terms of implementing its core social inclusion remit, it is not helped by a programme that is outdated (we have low unemployment and there are a plethora of agencies dealing with that matter, all unconnected); there are no impact indicators and SICAP is managed through an organisational complexity which is neither useful nor helpful”.

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centred on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

5.8.1.2 Supportive Staff

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

The majority of survey respondents praised the support of “helpful”, “friendly”, and “responsive” staff. There was an overall perception that the relevant LDC or Partnership provides efficient and useful guidance for LCGs and SEs when advice or guidance is requested. Indeed, in response to the question “What aspects of your engagement with the Local Development Company or Partnership were you most satisfied by?”, the overwhelming focus of responses was on the positive experience the consultees had with the staff. One consultee noted:

“They [the staff] are constantly in touch and will reach out via phone or email or even in person if required. They send us relevant information that we might not normally see without them. They also help us advertise our events on their website. We cannot praise them enough for their constant support and encouragement.”

The nature and level of staff interaction with LCGs and SEs was positive and helpful in the majority of cases. This is seen to be key strength of the Programme and staff should be adequately supported to retain and further enhance their current level of service and engagement with LCGs and SEs.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

However, in a small number of cases it was felt that staff are not responsive enough, with one consultee noting that:

“Just disappointed with the overall response with attempted interactions. Can take months to get back with responses to emails, different staff responding and having to repeat questions, reason for calling”.

Thus, efforts to ensure a more standardised approach to LCG and SE engagement will be required. A varied experience across LCGs and SEs should be avoided in the next iteration of the Programme.

5.8.1.3 Further Capacity Building and Support

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

57% of respondents indicated that they attended “training sessions and/or workshops” with the same percentage stating that they sought “advice and information” from their

relevant LDC or Partnership. These were the two most sought-after support types noted. Most people indicated that the outcome of seeking these supports was positive – with participants feeling that they had benefitted. However, it is less clear specifically what worked well for them in the absence of information around their stated goal in seeking these supports.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

However, notwithstanding this, some respondents noted that they do not feel fully equipped to complete funding applications and find the plethora of potential funding sources in Ireland, finding it difficult to effectively navigate. As such, a need for further capacity building in this space was considered important.

One respondent stated that:

“Applications forms can “put people off” – they need to be streamlined.”

Others referred to these forms as “daunting”, with one noting:

“When I applied on the first occasion, I received the application form, and it was daunting to try and figure out which applied or not. This could have left me in a position of Oh I won’t bother it’s too complicated, but I am persistent and found out from the office what was needed etc.”

Another participant stated that:

“I would love us to have access to more funding... doing activities is very complicated due to all the red tape attached.”

Beyond this, others felt that there was a need for “further presence on the ground”. One stated that they do not know what impact their relevant LDC has on community development as they “don’t see staff on the ground”. Connected to this, some respondents felt that their local LDC or Partnership are doing “good work around employment and education” but they are “pretty poor around community development”.

Similarly, another consultee noted that:

“The extent of apparently formulaic governance leaves the local community feeling that there is an undue focus on processes. box ticking etc., and that genuine interaction and involvement with the front facing community groups is lacking. Despite networks and training, community groups feel they essentially operate on their own without real support”.

5.8.1.4 Budgeting

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centered on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

It is noted that the SICAP budget remains much lower than it was in 2008 (i.e., prior to the financial crisis). Given the current cost of living crisis, and what one participant referred to as “the extremely high dependency LCGs and SEs have on SICAP for their continued existence”, the need for an increase in programme budget was highlighted. It was often also noted the administrative burden associated with SICAP does not adequately align with the administrative budget. In addition, it was highlighted that, for micro SEs, it is “not feasible spend money before we get it – so we don’t apply for all of the grants we are eligible for”.

5.8.1.5 Enhanced Collaboration and Synergies

What is Working Well? – Key Elements to Retain in the New Programme

This section is omitted as the focus within this thematic discussion was centered on elements to adapt within the next iteration of SICAP.

Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

There was a perception that there are duplications of effort occurring across organisations and agencies – which at times was deemed as a “competing support landscape”. As such, it was felt that there is a need to conduct further research into the direct relationships and “overlaps” between different funding programmes and supports.

One respondent stated that:

“We find the Partnership oppositional to our attempts to play a robust role in addressing social exclusion. The Partnership competes with many locally based community organisations and appear to wish to colonise all responses to social exclusion”.

Another stated that:

“Our role is diminishing as we have to ‘compete’ – this is a threat to our continued existence”.

With specific reference to work with migrants, one consultee noted that:

“We work with migrants... but there is a major need to integrate inter-agency services for migrants, it’s haphazard at best and the differing condition for different migrant groups is already causing confrontation and racial tension”.

5.8.2 Focus Area 1 – Targeting

It must be noted that 25% of survey respondents were not aware that supports they had received from their Local Development Company were delivered as part of SICAP, suggesting that overall awareness and visibility of the programme and its objectives need to be enhanced. There was also a perception that the support landscape in Ireland is ‘fragmented’ and should be streamlined. While many respondents referred to supports they had received as being ‘helpful’, others felt that LDCs or Partnerships ‘compete’ with the work of LCGs and SEs. In addition, many did not have an awareness of the full suite of supports available to them and many indicated that their needs, in terms of greater support in completing application forms, were not met. Thus, greater clarity around the specific needs of LCGs and SEs – including their own stated motivation for engaging with SICAP- would be beneficial.

5.8.3 Focus Area 2 – Monitoring and Outcomes

As noted previously, many respondents commented on the need for renewed emphasis on the community development approach. While many respondents felt that their LDC or Partnership is doing “good work” in terms of employment and education, there was comparatively less satisfaction around how embedded the community development approach is – and how such work is measured. Moreover, there was reference to an “undue focus on processes” and “tick boxing”. Overall, there was a sense that greater emphasis on “genuine interaction” with community groups is needed.

6 Recommendations

6.1 What is Working Well? – Key Elements to retain and enhance in the new programme

6.1.1 Ensuring continued flexibility in delivery approaches

The ability of LDCs to utilise more flexible delivery approaches during the COVID-19 period – and indeed the more recent crisis in Ukraine – was a key discussion point amongst consultees. It was felt that DRCD maintained this more flexible approach to support LDCs to deliver SICAP through the pandemic and Ukrainian refugee crisis. This flexibility was asserted as critical to successful and responsive programme delivery during crises. According to consultees, this increased flexibility was a key strength of the programme, which made the programme more resilient to unanticipated crisis or emergency events and should therefore be retained going forward.

Specifically, consultees involved in service delivery commented on their enhanced ability to provide practical supports to those most vulnerable in their communities as a result of a greater level of flexibility. The flexibility helped to create new actions and reallocate resources during the pandemic and Ukrainian refugee crisis.

This idea of flexibility was also linked to discussions around the theme of building greater local autonomy and trust between LDCs and LCDCs. Ensuring flexibility in delivery approaches was considered to be often dependent on the quality of the relationship between a given LDC and LCDC (e.g., the approval processes in place for making changes to annual plans).

The relationship between LDCs and LCDCs either facilitate or hinder change management processes (e.g., amendment of annual plans) at local level depending on quality of the relationship (i.e., some LDCs felt they have a lot of flexibility, due to a good working relationship with their LCDC and others felt challenged due to their relationship). Correspondingly, a consultative forum was regarded as a key contributing factor to ensuring responsiveness and flexibility during the pandemic and Ukrainian crisis.

Accordingly, further consideration around how to ensure standardised approaches to change management across LDCs and LCDCs would be beneficial – and could be facilitated through further discussions via the SICAP Forum, for example. In addition, greater consideration should be given to potential avenues to improve the relationships between LCDCs and LDCs and reduce inconsistencies in the manner in which changes are permitted and applied.

6.1.2 Enabling inclusive and flexible support delivery

It was noted that throughout the pandemic, when face-to-face engagements were restricted, many SICAP supports continued to be offered online. Connected to Recommendation 1.1, consultees felt that this transition to online support was extremely beneficial – both in ensuring continuity in the programme during a crisis period and in opening up new avenues for engagement for those who may have struggled to participate face-to-face before the pandemic.

Going forward, greater flexibility of support delivery can be achieved by allowing for both online and in-person engagement. Indeed, consultees noted the benefit of online, in-person, and hybrid engagements – and having the option of what ‘avenue’ might suit them best in certain circumstances. However, retaining online and hybrid accessibility should not reduce in-person options, as other groups could be excluded if offered online-only options. Accessibility features should also be considered in online engagement, such as adapting features for people with disabilities and ensuring accessibility of information more generally.

6.1.3 Further embedding and fostering the personalised approach to engagement

Beneficiaries stated that the greatest strength of the programme was the person-centred and friendly approach that staff take. Consultation findings indicate an appreciation of the holistic, person-centred, wraparound supports offered under SICAP, as well as specific staff engagement approaches, including one-to-one engagement, empathy, listening, mentoring, guiding, and supporting people through the process of engaging with and accessing other services. These engagement approaches and practices should therefore be further enhanced, promoted and, if possible, captured, in the next iteration of the programme.

6.1.4 Enhanced employer engagement

Stakeholders highlighted the benefits of using interactive approaches to enhance employment/ labour market focused course content and support delivery such as employer engagement and guest speakers on courses. Specifically, stakeholders expressed a belief that enhanced engagement from local employers was an effective approach to reduce fear and anxiety among individuals from hard-to-reach target groups who are more likely to be distant from the labour market. In addition, it was noted that these types of enhanced engagements improved retention and course completion rates.

For example, one approach to enhanced employer engagement incorporated guest speakers from local employers who talked through job specifications of open positions and highlighted the alignment of these specifications with the skills being developed

through SICAP supports. In addition, in this case, it was agreed with local employers that every individual who completed the SICAP course was guaranteed a formal interview. While this could not be guaranteed in every instance, this stands as a good example of employer engagement that resulted in a positive outcome for beneficiaries. Correspondingly, another approach that was discussed was to facilitate onsite visits for beneficiaries during a course to show where the skills they were developing would be applied in the workplace.

As such, engagement with local employers to enhance employment focused courses and supports should be retained in the next iteration of the programme, including documenting, and sharing effective good practices such as those outlined above.

6.1.5 Further emphasis on qualitative data input options

Consultees noted the benefit of collecting qualitative data, such as case studies, and using this information to demonstrate good practice and outcomes across the current SICAP programme (2018-2023).

Other stakeholders, such as representative organisations, highlighted the need for data on a wider range of outcomes that could be aggregated and analysed to inform programme learning at national level, which can be a challenge when dealing with narrative qualitative data.

It should also be noted that SICAP case studies informed the programme's winning submission for a UN Public Service Award (submitted in 2021 and awarded in 2022), as advised by Pobal. The fact that all case studies collected in 2020 could be classified as 'Covid-19 Response' projects by default facilitated their efficient use in showcasing SICAP work in the UN Public Service Award category 'Innovative Responses to Covid-19'. Further thematic analysis, conducted for the purposes of the submission, included key intervention areas such as food security and mental health and wellbeing, which further strengthened the use of SICAP case studies for robust analysis.

It is therefore recommended, for the next iteration of the programme, that collection of SICAP case studies be retained and further refined, and that a standardised hierarchy of thematic coding be developed, to facilitate searching and efficient use of case study data for future focused analysis. Further research and iterative testing would be required to develop and refine a closed list of thematic codes, which could be focused, for example, on target group, intervention area, intervention thematic focus, etc.

6.1.6 Maximising synergies and cross programme pollination

There was a perception across stakeholder groups that duplications of effort occur across organisations and agencies offering similar supports and services at local level.

As such, the need for enhanced collaboration between SICAP implementers with other providers of services in the area, such as NGOs and state agencies offering similar services at local level was expressed. Further research into the direct relationships, “overlaps”, and synergies between different funding programmes and target group supports is necessitated. This can then feed into making SICAP’s remit and objectives clearer and distinct, enabling better facilitation of signposting in and out of SICAP. Despite the aforementioned perception, collaboration and synergies between SICAP implementers and other providers of services were generally seen as programme elements that should be retained and further enhanced in the next iteration.

6.2 Areas for Improvement – Key Elements to Adapt in the New Programme

6.2.1 Enhance understanding of beneficiary needs and motivations

Consultee feedback indicates that the understanding of beneficiary needs, as well as how supports and activities are used in achieving individual goals or programme outcomes, could be enhanced. A refinement of current monitoring instruments could be achieved by introducing individual LCG and SE baseline (or pre-registration) surveys that could better capture beneficiary motivations for engaging with SICAP supports. Follow up annual or exit surveys could subsequently be used to assess progress towards individual level goals and satisfaction with the specific supports received. The beneficiary surveys developed for this review and consultation process could offer a useful starting point for developing such surveys.

A key rationale for introducing pre-registration surveys is to better understand goals and motivations of individual and group beneficiaries at the point they first engage with the programme. This would allow for a more detailed understanding of the supports that are most in demand and the types of beneficiaries seeking different types of supports. In addition, capturing data on beneficiary goals and motivations at the onset could allow SICAP to better tailor follow-up outcome measurement to the stated motivations of the beneficiary.

6.2.2 Continue to build on a reduction in emphasis on labour market activation for individual beneficiaries

Consultees noted that “progress” is much broader than whether or not a person has managed to get a job and recommended that progress should be viewed as any activity that brings the most marginalised individuals closer to the job market. Examples include soft skill development, confidence building, upskilling, and networking. Therefore, the

next iteration of SICAP should acknowledge that a focus on getting people into full-time jobs is not relevant for every beneficiary.

While SICAP recognises the importance of soft outcomes, the data needed to capture these outcomes when assessing the programme at national level is currently unavailable. While gaining employment is an appropriate outcome metric for those beneficiaries who engage with the programme to get a job, this may be a very long-term goal for those very distant from the labour market. More relevant for the latter is significant progress on intermediary soft outcomes, and this is not captured by simply measuring the long-term end goal. In short, while getting a job may be the ultimate end goal for some, working with high-need individuals is likely to be a long journey, which will include many “soft outcomes” before a “hard outcome” like securing employment is achieved.

The new programme should therefore place emphasis on the ‘Distance Travelled’ towards employment, rather than just employment itself, including key soft outcomes such as increased confidence and wellbeing and advancement in soft skills such as literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, and communication skills. However, to ensure that soft and hard outcomes are given equal focus in national level reporting and analysis, the programme requires robust data on soft outcome progression that can be analysed at national level. In other words, quantitative metrics on soft outcomes also need to be devised in order to aggregate data at the national level.

Potential solutions to the challenge of measuring soft outcomes could include the incorporation of ‘My Journey’ data into the programme monitoring framework and the IRIS database for appropriate beneficiaries (appropriateness could be determined, for example, by capturing beneficiaries’ start point and motivations at the point of entry via a baseline or pre-registration survey). The pre-registration questionnaire suggested in recommendation 2.1 would also enable a more detailed understanding of the type of supports that are working well (or conversely, that are not working well) to achieve particular programme outcomes and in addressing the stated motivations of those engaging with SICAP.

More efficient use of case studies could also facilitate data collection to track soft outcome progression for individuals for whom hard outcomes such as employment are deemed unrealistic within the timeframe of the intervention/ follow-up. For example, thematic coding would allow quantitative information on case studies to be aggregated at a national level and qualitative information to be more accessible for analysis. Additionally, for beneficiaries such as local community groups and social enterprises, a My Journey travel distance tool could also be developed to better capture the progress of group beneficiaries for future iterations of the programmes.

6.2.3 Further embed the community development approach

The concept of community development, a need to further enhance its understanding and focus within SICAP, and the need to better capture its good practices and outcomes, were discussed in-depth by consultees. A number of other recommendations also support this point, for example, mainstreaming of human rights and equality (Recommendation 2.16), focusing on outcomes over outputs (Recommendation 2.9), enhanced outreach, predevelopment work, and targeting of disadvantaged groups (Recommendation 2.7), collaborative working with target groups and their representative organisations (Recommendation 2.5), and ensuring communities are involved in identifying and formulating responses to issues that affect them (Recommendation 2.3.1). The community development approach involves developing the capacity of individuals and local community groups and social enterprises to be effective advocates for their communities and the design of activities for individuals with group/ community goals in mind.

Further embedding the community development approach should involve a shift away from linear or narrow conceptualisations of progress (as envisaged under the Community Development Matrix, for example), an improved understanding of what a quality community development approach entails, and a better capturing of its application, as well as the quality and depth of engagement.

For example, the only available information on SICAP group beneficiaries (e.g., community groups and social enterprises) relates to the number of groups supported. This data does not capture the amount of pre-development work undertaken to support group beneficiaries. The data also does not account for the long path from engaging and building the capacity of individuals to be advocates for their community, to becoming established community groups or social enterprises. Introducing a pre-registration and follow-up group beneficiary survey, as was recommended for individual beneficiaries, might be a good starting point for collecting better quality data on the characteristics of group beneficiaries, their motivations for engaging with the programme, and their outcomes and satisfaction with the support received. In addition, further research is required into the relationship and 'knock on' impacts between support efforts via Goals 1 and 2. Assessing this relationship would also contribute to an enhanced understanding of how individuals might move between goals (e.g., initially engage as an individual beneficiary under Goal 2 – supporting individuals – and then become involved under Goal 1 – supporting communities).

For the future iterations of the programme, the development of a Distance Travelled Tool to track incremental progress of community groups and social enterprises, from initial formation to full establishment, could be explored.

6.2.3.1 Enhanced capture of quality community development work

Capturing of quality community development work should also be improved, including through:

- Linking outcomes to stated individual beneficiary motivations for engaging with SICAP upon entry (and captured through a pre-registration survey (see Recommendation 2.1). Importantly, such a process will allow for capturing national outcomes on soft outcomes in a manner that accounts for the multiple motivations that individuals have for entering the programme. In turn, collating such data at a national level (i.e., the achievement or otherwise of soft outcomes) allows for the demonstration that quality community development work has occurred (i.e., that quality community development work aligns with beneficiary goals and results in better outcomes).
- Linking outcomes to stated LCG/ SE motivations for engaging with SICAP (as captured through annual surveys (see Recommendation 2.1).
- Enhance the ability to record and monitor soft outcomes. Data on soft outcomes can be collected through individual beneficiary and LCG/SE surveys, as above.
- Conducting stand-alone qualitative research projects.
- Exploring the potential use of a “distance travelled” style tool for community groups/ social enterprises – which could be utilised to informing the monitoring framework in the next iteration. As noted in Chapter 5, many LCGs feel that a “one size fits all” approach for assessing their progress is not appropriate.
- Enhanced capture and understanding of quality community development work in the context of SICAP, including improved definition of what constitutes as quality community development work in a SICAP context, with mechanisms in place to encourage and support quality enhancement.
- Better capturing of the depth and duration of interventions and of the level of need/ disadvantage of individuals engaged. In line with Recommendation 1.5, this could involve the use of thematically coded case studies which demonstrate the utility and value of different approaches / activities in different scenarios.

6.2.4 Enhanced focus on mental health and wellbeing

Most beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with course content overall. Specifically, individual beneficiaries singled out courses related to labour market activation (e.g., CV writing and reviewing, job search, mock interviews etc.) and setting up a business (e.g.,

courses providing an overview of setting up a business, creating a business plan and financial advice etc.) as particularly beneficial. However, there were also calls for increasing the variety of courses, so that areas like mental health and wellbeing are better represented.

The increasing importance of mental health and wellbeing for SICAP beneficiaries was noted by a variety of stakeholders. Enhanced efforts to address the needs of beneficiaries from a mental health and wellbeing perspective would be welcomed in the next iteration of the programme. Within this context, consultees highlighted the benefit of tailored mental health and wellbeing training courses, counselling supports and the utilisation of anxiety packs (e.g., stress balls, journals etc).

6.2.5 Pursue enhanced collaboration between target groups and their representative organisations

At local level, enhanced collaboration with target groups and their representative organisations, as well as local community groups, should be pursued in order to identify community needs and co-design interventions to address them. This is at the heart of a community development approach, consultees noted – which works to empower, enable and support communities to improve their quality of life. Working with marginalised target groups to analyse the disadvantages and inequalities they face in Irish society is complex and labour-intensive work, consultees stated. Yet, it is also critical in supporting groups to develop advocacy roles.

6.2.6 Explore the possibility of data sharing

Consultees noted that data collected from alternative government departments (outside of DRCD) could be used to inform decision-making in SICAP. Similarly, IRIS data could be shared with other departments to inform decision-making. Another option worth exploring, though accompanied by potential external barriers and GDPR implications, is that of accessing and linking SICAP data with administrative datasets from other government departments (such as Revenue or DSP). Such a measure could potentially allow follow-up outcome data to be collected without the use of follow-up surveys, which are limited by positive and non-response bias, and an administrative burden on beneficiaries and implementers. This would also aid in further focussing the content of follow-up surveys to collect data that is not readily available elsewhere, such as data on soft outcomes or satisfaction with services. However, the costs and benefits of requirements for setting up such data sharing would need to be explored and weighed before implementation of this recommendation should be considered.

6.2.7 Further enhance targeting through outreach activities

The importance of targeted outreach in local communities was highlighted by consultees as a critical aspect of engagement with the most disadvantaged target groups. Specifically, consultees proposed that enhanced outreach activities in the next iteration of the programme would be welcomed to ensure that the most disadvantaged find out about the programme and engage in the first instance, through targeted outreach activities.

Within this context, analysis has shown that a number of target groups have consistently been underrepresented on the SICAP caseload.¹⁸⁴ Namely, Long Term Unemployed, Travellers, Roma, Lone Parents, New Communities and People with Disabilities. A plethora of specific strategies were flagged as being beneficial for targeting the aforementioned target groups through the LDC – SICAP Practitioner consultations and by representative organisations. A number of key examples are presented below.

- **Target Group Champions:** The need for strong community leaders or champions who can promote their positive experiences of engaging with SICAP was considered important.
- **Culture and Art:** Cultural celebrations such as pride events, awareness campaigns and sport have been highlighted as effective strategies to promote social inclusion and enhanced engagement with wider communities.
- **Targeted Publicity Efforts:** Consultees have highlighted the importance of dynamic approaches to targeted information and publicity. A broad range of examples were presented throughout the detailed consultation findings, some of which are presented below.
 - Going to direct provision centres and engaging directly with potential beneficiaries.
 - Engaging with target groups and their representative organisations to reveal locations (e.g., where they typically reside) of potential beneficiaries.
 - Ensuring awareness of SICAP supports through word of mouth (as a way of overcoming literacy barriers).

¹⁸⁴ The findings of this analysis (i.e., the underrepresented target groups) were verified by representative organisations.

- Utilising newspaper, radio, social media, and the DSP to recruit new SICAP beneficiaries.
- Providing leaflets to potential beneficiaries in plain English and alternative languages (e.g., Arabic, Slovakian etc).
- Offering goodie bags to children to enhance engagement with families.

As shown from the LDC – SICAP practitioners and representative organisations consultations and the aforementioned examples, a variety of innovative and unique engagement strategies for targeting hard-to-reach groups are being utilised. However, representative organisations felt that a small number of Lots are particularly effective at targeted outreach activities whereas, a large number of Lots could benefit from shared learning from the particularly effective Lots. It would therefore be recommended that good practices of the exceptionally effective Lots are collated and shared with the wider group. This specific aspect of knowledge sharing could be incorporated into the programme requirements, as both requirements of implementation, but also areas to capture in monitoring and evaluation.

6.2.8 Pursue enhanced representation of SICAP target groups on the staff and governance structures of SICAP Programme Implementers

The importance of ensuring representation of target groups in decision-making processes was made clear by consultees, including direct and meaningful engagement in the design of SICAP activities and programmes of work, and ensuring they are represented among SICAP staff, management, and governance structures. This representation is considered important in allowing target group voices to be heard in a meaningful way – and to ensure that programme implementation and governance is shaped through their active involvement.

Such efforts should be supported with consideration of enhanced HR and antidiscrimination policies and also the provision of development opportunities to support individuals from target groups to be effective in these roles.

6.2.9 Rebalance emphasis on outputs over outcomes

Consultees have highlighted the problematic nature of attaching financial remedies to quantitative output targets and have recommended that less emphasis be placed on the two core KPIs as basic output measures do not capture the complexity of programme inputs, outputs, and outcomes. In addition, the reluctance to apply financial remedies means that, when an implementer fails to meet a target, the usual course of action is to negotiate reduced targets to avoid applying the remedy, rather than engaging with the implementer to support achievement of the target.

As SICAP has only two targets with financial remedies attached (i.e., the two KPIs), which count the number of individuals and community groups assisted – but not outcomes or changes for individuals or groups – the programme is driven towards these output targets at the expense of more meaningful outcomes, it was felt. As a result, while “easy wins” are incentivised, as the current programme does not effectively account for the additional time and energy required to support more marginalised individuals with greater support needs, and monitoring systems are not able to demonstrate where lower output numbers (i.e., numbers of individuals and community groups supported) is a result of an implementer targeting more disadvantaged groups with more intense support. In addition, representative organisations felt that this system encouraged a tokenistic target driven engagement of key marginalised groups.

This issue could be addressed by removing financial remedies on output targets alongside collection of better data on soft outcomes (see Recommendations 1.5 and 2.1-2.2). If this course of action is pursued, however, it would be important to establish alternative courses of action in the event that an implementer is not meeting its targets. This could provide an opportunity to implement, for example, a system that works with implementers to achieve the set target, rather than revising the target down to avoid application of the financial remedy.

Another option, which could be pursued independently or in combination, is better capturing of the quality and depth of engagement (see Recommendation 1.3) that could help build appropriate incentives for doing such quality, in-depth work. If financial remedies on output targets are retained in the new programme, alternative methods setting and tracking achievement of these targets, which account not only for the number of individual beneficiaries, but also their level of need/ disadvantage, should be explored, with a focus on accounting for multiple, overlapping and intersectional disadvantage. The multiple barriers tool developed previously by Pobal could be a useful starting point for this.

Altogether, these changes should help encourage sustainable, quality community development work, incentivise targeting of more high need individuals and groups, and address perceptions that the programme is focused on quantity over quality.

6.2.10 Pursue budget increases and enhanced financial support to ensure the resilience and sustainability of SICAP

6.2.10.1 Address administrative burden

Stakeholders noted the administrative burden associated with SICAP, such as tendering and reporting requirements, and argued that the administrative budget does not reflect administrative duties. Particularly noted were the difficulties encountered in making

SICAP actions fit the PEIL design and ESF monitoring requirements and SICAP staff servicing administration in other government programmes. Consultees felt these aspects would benefit from further review to reduce admin burden where possible (within limitations of key data collection and compliance requirements, which includes ESF requirements, but also the need to capture key information for an effective tendering process and for effective programme monitoring and evaluation). There were also calls to move away from ESF funding altogether noting that ESF co-funding results in a significant additional administrative burden while the co-funding received is not returned to the programme.

6.2.10.2 Enhanced programme funding

It is noted by consultees that the SICAP budget remains much lower than it was in 2008 (i.e., prior to the last financial crisis). Given the uncertain future economic forecasts as well as the rising energy costs and cost of living crisis, pursuit of budget increases and enhanced financial support should be prioritised in order to ensure the resilience and sustainability of SICAP.

Although the budget for SICAP is decided upon by the government annually via the national budgeting process, continued efforts should be made to highlight the need for increased budget to ensure sustained and positive impact.

Specifically, implementers highlighted a desire for more funding for administration spending, which is currently capped. The additional administration burden associated with ESF reporting was also highlighted, given that ESF co-funding is not refunded directly to the programme to account for this. Discussion around administrative budget also focused on SICAP budget being used to support administrative aspects of other programmes, which do not provide sufficient funding for their administration. It should also be noted, however, that contract holders (LCDCs) expressed concern that too much of the SICAP budget is directed to administrative rather than programmatic spending.

These points demonstrate that enhanced overall programme funding, or a decrease of the cap currently placed on the proportion of funding that can be used for administrative purposes, would not be sufficient to address this issue. The resolution of these issues would be outside the programme design remit and would require decisions and actions at a policy level.

For example, DRCD could engage with DPER to request that a portion of ESF co-funding goes back into the programme to cover the additional administrative burden on SICAP implementers. In addition, DRCD could engage with other government departments to ensure that other programmes provide sufficient administrative funding so that SICAP funding does not get redirected into supporting admin for other programmes.

6.2.10.3 Review staff recruitment and retention measures

LCDCs and LDCs noted difficulties in terms of staff retention due to pay and working conditions and, to a lesser extent, upskilling opportunities. Staff recruitment and retention has been noted as a current issue for the private, public, and non-profit sector in Ireland in recent years. Specifically, in SICAP, staff recruitment and retention issues have stemmed from an inability to provide career security (due to annual budgeting) or salary increases, additional benefits or options for continuous professional development (due to funding and capping of administration spend), an issue compounded in the context of rising living costs. Although many of these issues cannot be resolved through SICAP programme design (as funding is externally set), provision of enhanced CPD opportunities should be explored in order to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce.

6.2.11 Promote innovative pilot initiatives

Stakeholders note that funding and enhanced facilitation of innovative pilot initiatives would be welcomed in the next iteration. Pre-set quantitative targets are not appropriate for innovative pilot projects, where outcomes are far less certain. One option for accommodating such innovative pilots, without affecting data collection needs across the programme, would be the establishment of a ring-fenced innovation fund (separate to general programme actions and requirements) to fund such projects, but with different monitoring and reporting requirements more appropriate to innovative pilots. For example, requiring a formal structure of needs analysis (at the beginning) and formal evaluation (at the end) with the expectation that successful projects would be written up as models that could be replicated and/ or scaled up, and lessons learned from unsuccessful projects collated and shared. If such a ring-fenced fund was set up, consideration would have to be given to the allocation method and requirements (including a potential application and appraisal process) for implementers to access this funding.

6.2.12 Review the utility of the Disadvantaged Area target

There should be further exploration of the impact of evolving spatial dynamics on the roll out of the next iteration of SICAP. This includes further consideration of the utility of the Deprived Area Target and the impact of shifting conceptualisations of urban and rural areas and differing disadvantage across these areas. It is noted that the Deprivation Index determines who ultimately falls into this category.

Across the stakeholder engagement process, many consultees highlighted the impact of changes to national housing policies that have resulted in disadvantaged individuals residing in areas that are less deprived overall. This is due to, for example, the Housing Assistance Programme (HAP), as well as emergency hotel accommodation for refugees,

asylum seekers and people experiencing homelessness. As a result of these policies, disadvantage may be less spatially concentrated in some instances, including rural areas.

Hence, there is a need to consider if the Deprivation Index itself could be adapted to address spatial disadvantage – or indeed whether criteria for defining someone as being a member of a qualifying target group needs to be further expanded. As an alternative course of action, individuals could be considered where they live in a deprived area (as per the Deprivation Index) or indeed if they are in receipt of HAP or be living in emergency accommodation. It is noted that refugees would qualify separately as a different target group.

In addition, and connected to the above, target setting at a national level would be better informed by enhanced local data, which would provide a more comprehensive picture of local nuance. In particular, county and Lot level demographic profiles (developed using CSO data) would facilitate more robust spatial analysis of data at key spatial scales (see Recommendation 2.13).

6.2.13 Enhanced data usage

Further enhancements to data collation and usage processes would be beneficial, including:

- Reform of existing registration forms and surveys to align with methodological changes in wider data sets used for national comparison from the CSO and Eurostat, to allow for more comparative analysis of IRIS data with these administrative datasets.
- For example, ‘disadvantaged women’, which is currently a target group, is not captured in other data sets and lacks a clear definition that would allow for alignment, particularly given that a ‘disadvantaged woman’ may fall into another target group such as ‘lone parent’ or ‘Traveller’, as highlighted in the consultation with the National Women’s Council of Ireland.
- Issue a Special Tab request to the CSO for disaggregated information on variables by target groups (i.e., variable X by Traveller, Roma etc.). This will help establish the target groups baseline, allowing SICAP to review the database of individual beneficiaries and ensure that it is representative of those specific populations rather than solely representative of the national/county profile.

6.2.14 Enhanced targeting using county and lot level demographic profiles

County and Lot level demographic profiles could be established using CSO data to facilitate more robust spatial analysis of data at key spatial scales and to inform local planning and targeting. Specifically, this enhanced evidence base would inform SICAP planning, aid in setting targets at local level and would inform the process through which implementers apply for funding. Ultimately, this would ensure that implementers can develop local plans and tender proposals in line with a clear, identified local need, within the framework of a national programme. This could allow for national level requirements in the tendering process while also setting targets set at local level, based on local need, through referral to robust and evidence-based Lot-level analysis.

6.2.15 Enhanced capturing of overlapping disadvantage

There is currently an opportunity for enhanced capturing of individual disadvantage and understanding the potential compounding effects of multiple, overlapping disadvantage. Indeed, it is critical to understand not only the different experiences of certain beneficiaries, but also what drives such differences, and what the programme can do to address any barriers to participation or progression.

Although the current system allows for individuals to be allocated to multiple target groups, it is possible that an individual is recorded as a member of just one or a limited number of relevant groups at registration stage (e.g., if someone is both a Traveller and has a disability).

Given the fact that consultees reiterated the importance of trust and rapport for effective outreach, engagement and service delivery, scenarios may emerge whereby beneficiaries are initially reluctant to share the multiple layers of disadvantage that they face. Hence, additional mechanisms to capture overlapping disadvantage may be better suited during or upon receiving supports / services. Although a beneficiary must fall into at least one target group to be eligible for SICAP support, it may be useful to revisit this allocation upon completion of a course (once relationships have been established) to see if they fall into more than one category and thus enhance data capturing of overlapping disadvantage.

6.2.15.1 Review of variables with high non-response rate and engagement with PIs

A review should be undertaken of Lots with a high proportion of 'Requested but not provided' records to discern the root cause of the issue. For example, it should be determined whether all questions are being asked; if respondents don't feel comfortable answering questions; whether this data can be collected by other means etc. In

addressing this, PIs should be supported through further guidance (see Recommendation 2.14.2).

6.2.15.2 Staff training and production of a data collection guidance document and a codebook for PIs

Data collection training for PIs as well as the development of a guidance document could help with better communicating the purpose, uses, and benefits of sensitive data collection to beneficiaries. Such a document should also include:

- Guidance for staff on how to effectively engage beneficiaries when collecting this data and to inform them of the importance of collecting it for service improvement.
- Guidance for staff on SICAP’s continued ethnic equality data collection. Training should also be undertaken to support implementation in a human rights compliant manner using the “SICAP Ethnic Data Collection: Good Practice Guidelines” for Programme Implementers.
- Guidance for staff on how to interrogate and address variables with a ‘non-response rate’ greater than 10% to discern the root cause of the issue(s), noting that some areas cannot be made compulsory due to GDPR considerations.
- Targets of less than 5% ‘non-response rate’ for the Individual Beneficiary database, with an upper limit of 10%. These thresholds will ensure more credible/defensible reporting. Such targets could be achieved by requesting the information at follow-up sessions during a participants journey through the programme (again where feasible given GDPR considerations).
- Pobal could develop a codebook with details on each variable collected, its type, location in the survey and/or beneficiary registration form, question text, instructions to respondents, and format of response across all surveys/forms to improve quality of interpretation and administration of the data.

6.2.16 Enhanced Engagement with Social Enterprises (SEs)

Enhanced focus on Social Enterprise (SE) development was regarded as a positive aspect of the current iteration of the programme. However, several areas for improvement were suggested throughout stakeholder consultations to ensure that SEs can effectively leverage their unique position.

6.2.16.1 Enhanced Awareness of the facilitatory role of SEs

Consultees noted that SEs are not just meeting needs in the community, rather, they are providing a range of opportunities in the community for those most excluded from the labour market. Within this domain, enhanced awareness of the facilitatory role of SEs (in terms of providing social entrepreneurship, job opportunities, training, and volunteering opportunities for SICAP beneficiaries) is required. To recognise and support these contributions, additional investment and support for SEs to catalyse development will be essential.

6.2.16.2 Supporting SEs in Climate Action

Consultees expressed a belief that SEs are uniquely positioned to support entrepreneurs to create a lasting social impact on the community and economy. Moreover, it was noted that SEs are ideally placed to align with climate action. As such, enhanced knowledge sharing of the impact of SEs/ best practice in terms of climate action would be welcomed. For example, as a thematic focus for the SICAP case studies.

6.2.16.3 Data Capturing of SEs

Several stakeholders pointed out that some aspects of SICAP work are not sufficiently reflected by IRIS. Specifically, concern has been raised around the recording of SEs as Community Groups in IRIS, which was not deemed to capture fully the nature or amount of support they require. Given that the ILDN and Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI) won the contract to undertake the National Census of Social Enterprises, information from this process should inform the next iteration of SICAP.

Correspondingly, the exploration of the potential use of a “distance travelled” style tool for community groups/ SEs (see Recommendation 2.3.1) could be carried out to inform the monitoring framework in the next iteration.

6.2.17 Ensure awareness of and alignment with relevant policy and with international human rights and equality obligations

The goals of SICAP intersect with several overarching international and national policy objectives that seek to reduce poverty and social exclusion. The next iteration of the programme should continue to ensure awareness of and alignment with relevant UN, EU, and national policy and with international human rights and equality obligations (as outlined in Chapter 3), as well as ensuring that European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) requirements are incorporated into the new programme design, to ensure the programme’s continued access to ESF+ co-funding.

For example, this should include (but not be limited to):

- Department of Rural and Community Development’s agreed set of “Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership with the Community and Voluntary Sector”;
- European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) requirements;
- The UN Sustainable Development Goals;
- The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025;
- Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019-24 (SIandEC);
- The range of national social inclusion policies and strategies focused on key SICAP Target Groups;
- The National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR).

6.2.18 Integrating climate action, particularly in promoting a just transition

The UN Sustainable Development Goals recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must align with strategies that seek to improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve natural environment and biodiversity.

Climate change is a central societal challenge – and one with varying impacts for different social groups, particularly those who are less economically secure or who are systemically disadvantaged. Indeed, it can also exacerbate existing disadvantage. This necessitates further mainstreaming of climate issues within programmes like SICAP.

The next iteration of SICAP should explicitly recognise interrelationships outlined above and should seek to provide a platform for target group voices’ to be heard in designing effective pathways for climate action.

It should also be noted that the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) places significant focus on climate action. Ensuring that the labour market has the skills required for green transition, including retrofitting programmes, is likely to require upskilling and training that could be supported by ESF+ in the coming years. This should be a core consideration for the next iteration of SICAP to ensure ongoing access to ESF co-funding.

6.2.19 Further embed accessibility and inclusion measures in evolving service delivery approaches

A significant number of consultees highlighted the benefit of increased online engagements and supports that were brought about because of the pandemic. Specifically, consultees expressed satisfaction due to increased accessibility (e.g., reduced travel burden and could be carried out while ensuring caring responsibilities).

On the contrary, several consultees highlighted the inadvertent impact of online engagements in terms of further isolating individuals who may not have the technologies/capabilities to engage online.

Taken together, the aforementioned points highlight several key ideas for consideration. While online media and hybrid approaches should be made available in the next iteration of the programme (where appropriate), these should complement, not replace the availability of in-person supports, to increase the range of options available to diverse stakeholders. In addition, and key to expansion of online options, SICAP implementers should seek to further embed accessibility and inclusions measures, particularly regarding accessibility of information and online spaces. To inform this approach, the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the NDA's Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) provides a range of useful tools and guidelines that could be applied.

The CEUD is dedicated to enabling the design of environments that can be accessed, understood, and used regardless of a person's age, size, ability, or disability. CEUD's guidelines and tools could assist in enhancing accessibility of in-person, online and hybrid engagements. For example, plain English proofing of all written documentation, clear guidelines for accessibility proofing documents and print, a universally designed website that can enable users to change the onscreen text size and colour, use of images as well as text for navigation, accessibility proofing hyperlinks and images, and accessibility plug ins such as read aloud functions etc. As previously alluded to, accessibility is not always related to disability and indeed these measures can also assist those with literacy challenges as well as communities for whom English may not be their first language (such as Ukrainian refugees or Gaeltacht areas).

Appendix 1: Individual Beneficiary Survey

- To start, please tell us what Local Development Company or Partnership you got support from?
- How did you find out about the services and support offered by your Local Development Company or Partnership? (please select one answer)
- Since you selected other - please tell us how you found out about the support available to you at your Local Development Company
- What skills did you want to improve? (select all that apply)
- After getting this support, how do you feel about your chances of getting a job? (select one)
- After getting this support, how do you feel about setting up your own business? (select one)
- What type of Government services did you want to access? (select all that apply) Since you selected other - please tell us what other Government services you wanted to access? Did you get the support you needed to access these services? (select one)
- Please tell us how the support you received helped you to access these services.
- Did the support you got help you to meet people or become more involved in your community? (select one)
- Please tell us how the support you received helped to meet people or become more involved in your community.
- Please tell us how the support you received helped a bit to meet people or become more involved in your community.
- After getting this support, how do you feel about your confidence? (select one)
- After getting this support, how do you feel about your mental health and/or wellbeing (select one)
- Please tell us how the support you received helped to improve your mental health and/ or wellbeing.

- Please tell us about any other type of support you were looking for from your Local Development Company or Partnership and if you felt this support was useful to meet your personal goals.
- For how long did you receive these supports from your Local Development Company or Partnership? (select one)
- Thinking back on your overall experience getting support from your Local Development Company or Partnership, are you: (select one)
- Please choose one word to describe your overall experience getting support from your local development company or partnership.
- What was the best thing about the service you got your Local Development Company or Partnership – what should not change?
- If you could change one thing about the service you got from your Local Development Company or Partnership, what would it be?
- Do you have any other suggestions to improve these services for other people in the future?
- What is your gender?
- What is your age?
- Please select all that apply
 - ✓ I have a disability
 - ✓ I am a member of the Traveller Community
 - ✓ I am a member of the Roma Community
 - ✓ I was born outside of Ireland
 - ✓ I am a refugee
 - ✓ I am a single parent
- What is your current employment situation?
- If in employment (full or part-time), how much are you paid every month?
- What is your highest level of education?

- What is your housing situation?
- Do you receive HAP to support your rent payments?
- Since you selected other - please tell us about your housing situation
- Please let us know if you have any other comments or suggestions that you would like to share.

Appendix 2: LDC Focus Group

- 1 When planning SICAP activities how are SICAP target groups included in identifying their own needs and the activities designed to address them, whether by engaging them directly or their representative organisations?
- 2 What specific outreach actions/ strategies do you employ to ensure that the long-term unemployed access SICAP services?
- 3 What specific outreach actions/ strategies do you employ to ensure that lone parents access SICAP services?
- 4 What specific outreach actions/ strategies do you employ to ensure that Travellers and Roma access SICAP services?
- 5 What specific outreach actions/ strategies do you employ to ensure that non-Ukrainian asylum seekers/ refugees / disadvantaged new communities access SICAP services?
- 6 What specific outreach actions/ strategies do you employ to ensure that people with disabilities access SICAP services?
- 7 What specific actions/ strategies do you employ to support the progression and ongoing participation of the long term unemployed in SICAP?
- 8 What specific actions/ strategies do you employ to support the progression and ongoing participation of lone parents in SICAP?
- 9 What specific actions/ strategies do you employ to support the progression and ongoing participation of Travellers and Roma in SICAP?
- 10 What specific actions/ strategies do you employ to support the progression and ongoing participation of non-Ukrainian asylum seekers/ refugees / disadvantaged new communities in SICAP?
- 11 What specific actions/ strategies do you employ to support the progression and ongoing participation of people with disabilities in SICAP?

Appendix 3 LCDC Focus Group

A SWOC (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges) analysis was utilised to steer the focus group and to gather insights that would inform the review of the programme. Thus, the discussion was framed around 4 key thematic questions:

- What are the core strengths of the programme?
- What are the core weakness of the programme?
- What are primary opportunities facing the programme?
- What are primary challenges facing the programme?

Appendix 4 LCG and SE Survey

- 1 To start, please tell us which Local Development Company or Partnership you have received support from? Please tick all that apply.
- 2 How did you find out about the services and support offered by your Local Development Company or Partnership? (please select one option)
- 3 What is your group's legal form?
- 4 Which of the below applies to your group (please select all that apply)?
- 5 What type of charity are you?
- 6 How many fulltime staff do you employ?
- 7 How many parttime staff do you employ?
- 8 How many volunteers do you work with?
- 9 What is your annual income?
- 10 Which of the below options best describes the purpose of your group?
- 11 How many years has your LCG/SE been in operation?
- 12 Does your LCG/SE currently have any employees/volunteers from any of the following SICAP target groups (select all that apply)?
- 13 Does your LCG/SE provide services to any of the following SICAP target groups (select all that apply)?
- 14 Before engaging with this survey, were you aware that supports you received from your Local Development Company were delivered as part of SICAP?
- 15 Which of the following support types describe the SICAP supports you have received from your local development company (Select all that apply)?
- 16 What was the outcome of receiving this advice and information? What was the outcome of receiving business planning support?
- 17 What was the outcome of receiving support with your governance? What was the outcome of receiving this research and needs analysis support?

- 18 What was the outcome of receiving support in setting up and/or developing your group?
- 19 What was the outcome of receiving these training sessions and/or workshops?
- 20 What was the outcome of using this meeting space?
- 21 What was the outcome of receiving these financial supports?
- 22 What was the outcome of receiving these supports in setting up and developing new activities, services, or projects?
- 23 What was the outcome of receiving these supports in developing a strategic plan?
- 24 What was the outcome of receiving this funding application support?
- 25 What was the outcome of attending these networking events?
- 26 What was the outcome of receiving these supports to gain representation on decision-making structures?
- 27 Thinking back on your overall experience getting supports from your Local Development Company or Partnership; are you?
- 28 What aspects of your engagement with the Local Development Company or Partnership were you most satisfied by?
- 29 What aspects of your Local Development Company or Partnership's support could be improved?
- 30 Do you feel that you have the necessary support to further develop in the manner you would like?
- 31 What additional supports do you require to develop in the manner you would like?
- 32 Please let us know if you have any other comments or suggestions you would like to share.

Appendix 5: Representative Organisations Focus Group

Questions were structured across both Goals, as follows:

Goal 1

1 Part of SICAP's role is to support marginalised groups to identify and address social exclusion and equality issues. What are the core social inclusion and equality issues faced by the groups you represent?

2 From your experience and knowledge, does SICAP support the groups you represent to identify and address these issues within their local communities? Could more be done/ how could this be done better?

3 What specific strategies and approaches could be used by SICAP to better support the group(s) you represent to get actively involved in their communities and/or form community groups/ social enterprises to advance their collective interests?

4 What specific strategies and approaches could be used by SICAP to better support community/ social enterprises led by/ advancing the interests of the group(s) you represent?

Goal 2

5 From your experience and knowledge does SICAP proactively engage with and support the group(s) you represent? How could this be improved?

6 What barriers are faced by the group(s) you represent in accessing the types of supports delivered under SICAP? How can these be overcome?

7 Goal 2 currently focusses on supporting disadvantaged individuals through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market supports. Is this sufficient or are there other areas of support that would benefit the group(s) you represent, particularly those who are most disadvantaged?

8 Have you any recommendations for specific engagement strategies and/or innovative methods of service delivery that could be used to increase access to and use of SICAP services by the group(s) you represent, particularly those who are most disadvantaged.

Appendix 6 Government Departments and State Agencies Survey

- 1 To start, please tell us which Department or Government Agency you are from.
- 2 How familiar are you with SICAP?
- 3 When often does your department or agency engage with SICAP or SICAP funded personnel?
- 4 When you engage with SICAP, who do you engage with?
- 5 Why do you engage with SICAP?
- 6 What has worked well in your engagement with SICAP?
- 7 What could be improved in future engagement with SICAP?
- 8 SICAP provides services and supports to specific target groups. Which of the SICAP Target groups are priority groups for your work? (Select all that apply)
- 9 Are there additional target groups, outside of the existing SICAP target groups, that are of high priority for supports under your work?
- 10 Could you please name these additional target groups that are high priority for supports under your work?
- 11 Please list in order the top three target groups that you think should be prioritised for support in the new SICAP including the additional groups you listed above. Please explain your answer.
- 12 SICAP provides supports in specified areas. Looking at the list below, please select the areas that best align with your work.
- 13 Are there additional support areas, outside of the above-named ones, that are high priority areas for your work?
- 14 Could you provide details about these additional supports areas that are high priority areas for your work?
- 15 Please rank the top three areas of support that you think should be prioritised in the new SICAP including the supports areas you mentioned above.

- 16 Do you see potential for collaboration between your work and SICAP in the new SICAP?
- 17 Could you let us know the areas where there is potential for collaboration?
- 18 Please let us know if you have any other comments or suggestions that you would like to share.

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