

APPENDIX

Evidence for Selection of Programme Priorities for 2022/2023

1 .New Communities and those living in Direct Provision Centres

Immigrants and people from new communities are recognised as one of the most vulnerable groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The OECD research on the impact of the pandemic on this group internationally found:

- Immigrants are at twice the risk of COVID-19 infection and mortality than the native-born. This is due to a range of vulnerabilities such as higher incidence of poverty, overcrowded housing conditions, and high concentration in jobs where physical distancing is difficult.
- Labour market outcomes are negatively impacted because of less stable employment conditions; lower seniority on the job; overrepresentation in those sectors most affected by the pandemic to date. For example, in the particularly hard-hit hospitality industry, a quarter of employees in the EU are foreign-born, twice their share in overall employment. Immigrants experience increased discrimination in times of a slack labour market and have a curtailed network of contacts which are more relevant for finding a job.
- The school closures and distance learning measures put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 put children of immigrants at a disadvantage, in several ways. Their parents tend to have fewer resources than native-born parents to help them in their homework, and 40% of native-born children of immigrants do not speak the host-country language at home. Such children are also less likely than students with native-born parents to have access to a computer and an internet connection at home or to a quiet place for study.

In light of growing unemployment and the role of international travel in the initial spread of the pandemic, there is a risk of a backlash in public opinion against immigrants. (OECD October 2020) <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/>

The vulnerabilities for immigrants in general are even greater for those seeking asylum and who are catered for in the discredited Direct Provision system. Ongoing criticism has led to the Government to produce a White Paper on ending Direct Provision by 2024. (A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service, 2021) <https://assets.gov.ie/124757/ef0c3059-b117-4bfa-a2df-8213bb6a63db.pdf>

In the meantime, Direct Provision Centres which are not conducive to public health guidelines such as social distancing will remain until at least 2022. 1,700 asylum seeker residents share rooms with non-family members; canteens cater for all residents at once at mealtimes; and residents use shared washing and laundry spaces. There have been a number of Covid-19 outbreaks across Direct Provision Centres, which can be linked to such practices. (Murphy, Fiona. 2021. Direct Provision, Rights and Everyday Life for Asylum Seekers in Ireland during COVID-19. Social Sciences 10: 140. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10040140>)

The new communities target group in SICAP encompasses disadvantaged people who are migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. According to a recent Pobal publication on 'The role of SICAP in

Supporting New Communities' this target group makes up a high proportion of SICAP clients in 2018-2019 period at 14% of the caseload which accounted for 7,449 individuals. <https://www.pobal.ie/local-development-companies-proven-to-play-a-key-role-in-migrant-integration-report-finds/>

The majority were disadvantaged migrants (73%, 5,430), 16% or 1,168 were asylum seekers and the remaining 11% (851) were refugees. SICAP has also supported 255 LCGs that primarily target new communities, equating to 7% of all LCGs supported by the programme.

The report recognise that asylum seekers face specific or unique challenges and barriers to social inclusion in Ireland and highlighted the need to develop strategies to enable SICAP to better respond to their needs. The report refers to evidence that shows that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (new communities) face numerous barriers to social and economic inclusion in Ireland, including language barriers, racism and discrimination, mental health issues and structural barriers to accessing employment and education opportunities

The report refers to the different socio-economic characteristics of new communities. For example, refugees are more likely to be educated at secondary level or below than migrants, asylum seekers and other SICAP clients while asylum seekers are much more likely to be economically inactive than all other clients due to the legal restrictions they face around employment.

It notes that asylum seekers and refugees are at a high risk of social and economic disadvantage and experience multiple barriers to social inclusion. In particular, they are more likely to live in a jobless household, be at risk of homelessness or in challenging living arrangements and experience a transport barrier than other SICAP clients. The location of Direct Provision centres, often on the outskirts of towns, can leave asylum seekers disconnected from the urban centres, as evidenced by the high proportion (66%) of asylum seekers experiencing transport barriers. Furthermore, the trauma and mental health issues experienced by asylum seekers and refugees (often due to their reason for seeking asylum) are difficult to address due to gaps in the availability of mainstream mental health services in Ireland.

The report highlighted that the activities, events and courses delivered by SICAP provided the spaces for new communities to meet new people and develop social connections. The programme also supported local community groups targeting new communities to organise and participate in local events (e.g. through dance, music), thereby creating opportunities for the groups to celebrate their culture and interact with others in the area.

The report presents *the positive contribution that SICAP makes towards the integration of newcomers in communities across Ireland and also presents useful findings to inform practice going forward.* The report puts forward a number of clear recommendations based on learning from SICAP implementation to date and emphasises the opportunity to improve consistency of implementation going forward.

Programme Recommendation

Recommendations from the report include promoting SICAP's role within the wider sector working with new community groups, the need to 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 and the need for additional

financial investment to strengthen and support the work of SICAP going forward to include dedicated staff time, translation services and capacity building.

It is recommended that the SICAP priorities supporting New Communities with a particular focus on those living in Direct Provision Centres. The type of work could include initiatives to support community integration, address language barriers and support access to services and opportunities locally.

2. People with Mental Health issues

Even before the pandemic the 2015 Healthy Ireland Survey found that probable mental health problems are considerably more likely to be detected among those living within the most deprived areas at 13% compared with 5% of those living within the least deprived areas. *Healthy Ireland Survey Report 2014-2015*. <https://assets.gov.ie/16210/525a06d3aaef4f23889c8fbdcc40d40a.pdf>.

There are clear indications that the pandemic, alongside the prolonged lockdown restrictions, have led to an intensification of mental health issues in Ireland. This has also been highlighted by LDCs in the 2020 Mid and End of Year reports, where it was noted that an increasing number of people (including young people) are presenting with mental health issues and concerns. This is supported by numerous pieces of research carried out within the last 12 months, examples as follows:

Research on the impacts of COVID 19 on Mental Health by Trinity College found that 1 in 5 people has significantly increased psychological distress (e.g. anxiety and depression). It also identifies women and those living alone as at greater risk. COVID 19 infection itself affects mental health in both the short and long term and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are at greater risk of infection. *Brian Kelly, Irish Medical Journal; Vol 113; No. 10; P214 (November 2020)*. Available at: <https://imj.ie/impact-of-covid-19-on-mental-health-in-ireland-evidence-to-date/>

According to Barnardos, “there is a worrying picture emerging post lockdown of families being referred to services suffering a combination of the ‘toxic three, – mental health issues, domestic violence and addiction issues”. Barnardos (October 2020) Media Release: <https://www.barnardos.ie/news/2020/october/mental-health-domestic-violence-and-addiction-issues>

The Irish Youth Foundation commissioned Amárach Research to conduct a survey with marginalized teenagers and young adults (age 15-23) on the impact of the pandemic. The survey found that mental health, isolation and education were the burning issues for most vulnerable young people. *Irish Youth Foundation (June 2020): Generation Pandemic – Mental Health, isolation, and education the burning issues for most vulnerable children and young people as a result of COVID-19* [IYF-Generation-Pandemic-Release.pdf](https://www.iryf.ie/Generation-Pandemic-Release.pdf)

The National Youth Council of Ireland’s “COVID-19 and Youth Work. A review of the Youth work sector Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (June 2020)” reports a high level of concern over the negative impact of COVID-19 on young people’s mental health.

The OECD report “Youth and COVID-19 Response, Recovery and Resilience” survey confirms significant psychological impacts of social distancing and quarantining measures on young people causing stress, anxiety and loneliness. “Since the global spread of COVID-19 there has been substantial research conducted to identify the immediate and possible long-term impact on young people. The research shows that young people have and will be adversely affected in the areas of mental health, education, economically and socially” (OECD 2020)

Programme Recommendation

It is recommended that the SICAP Programme prioritise supporting people with mental health issues, including a specific emphasis on young people. The expectation is that SICAP is not involved in the direct delivery of mental health services but facilitate access to services, develop referral paths and build capacity within communities.

Given the increased level of anxiety in communities due to the pandemic LDCs could consider ways to upskill frontline staff in raising awareness and engaging with people with mental health issues in a sensitive manner.

The type of work could include collaborating with youth/mental health organisations to provide wellbeing and resilience programmes, suicide awareness and prevention initiatives, initiatives to address rural and social isolation, support LCGs to develop skills and supports to enable them to counter mental health issues that can occur in their daily lives, raise awareness of mental health issues, empower communities to address health and wellbeing issues, training for individuals seeking to return to employment and or training/education for those who would view themselves as being very distant from the labour market due to their mental health issues etc.

3.Long Term Unemployed

“The unemployed continued to make up the majority (56%, 14,635) of SICAP clients, accounting for 3% of all unemployed people in Ireland in December 2020 (including those in receipt of the PUP). Despite the programme’s objective to reduce long-term intergenerational unemployment, there has been a decrease in the ratio of long-term unemployed people to short-term unemployed people on the caseload since 2018. The proportion of long-term unemployed has decreased year-on-year from 31% in 2018 to 27% in 2020, while the proportion of short-term unemployed has increased from 26% in 2018 to 29% in 2020. As such, 2020 marks the first year that more short-term than long-term unemployed people were supported by the programme. This is noteworthy as short-term unemployed people on the caseload to date were less likely to experience multiple barriers than the long-term unemployed, more likely to be educated above secondary level, and more likely to progress into employment.” (Sourced from draft SICAP 2020 Annual Progress Report).

The Programme Requirements states that “SICAP should prioritise the reduction of long-term, intergenerational unemployment, which is often evidenced by jobless households and entrenched joblessness. The emphasis should be on working with people who are least likely to find employment. Clients might be far from the labour market as they do not have the skills, experience or capacity to take up work in the near future.”

Programme Recommendation

- LDC review the lot level data on LTUs and establish the trends and accompanying factors for any reduction in numbers in recent years.
- Build awareness within the lot of the need to focus on the longer term unemployed
- Review the engagement strategy for LTUs and develop alternative approaches to increase the focus on this target group for the remainder of the programme
- Develop targeted supports for the LTU and build the existing collaborations and links with other agencies to assist in this work.

4.Travellers /Roma

In a recent report published by the St Stephen's Green Trust which provides a qualitative picture of Travellers' employment pathway journey and their experiences in employment, highlighted situation and experience of Travellers in regard to their pathway towards employment. This report documented that there is a significant employment gap between Travellers and non-Travellers. Census 2016 data indicate that the unemployment rate for Travellers, at 80%, is six times that of the general population. The data further indicated that 11.3% of Travellers identified they were unable to work due to a disability; nearly three times the rate for the general population (at 4.3%). The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, in a 2020 survey, found that, in comparison to the five other EU countries surveyed, Ireland had the lowest percentage of Travellers in employment (13% of Traveller men and 17% of Traveller women). A 2018 report by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) examined the experiences and services interaction of those in households where no one is working or where there is only marginal attachment to the labour force. The report noted that the groups most likely to be facing multiple reasons for unemployment were Travellers and African migrants, citing literacy/language proficiency issues, lack of work experience, discrimination, and length of time out of work.

According to IRIS the number of Travellers and Roma supported under the programme remains low at 2.6% of the overall caseload from 2018 – 2020. While the actual number of Roma and Travellers engaged in the programme has decreased, the percentage of total caseload has increased (from 1.7% in 2017 to 2.9% in 2020).

Programme Recommendation

It is recommended that the SICAP Programme increase the focus on the Traveller community by taking on board the specific recommendations in the report; "Travellers in the Mainstream Labour Market: Situation, Experience, and Identity" that focus on LDCs and the SICAP programme, these include:

- Take specific actions to increase uptake of programmes by Travellers
- Provide targeted services to Travellers as part of their local employment service provision; and
- Build Traveller awareness of social enterprise opportunities and provide supports to enable Travellers and Traveller organisations to take advantage of these opportunities. Traveller organisations have a role in advancing Traveller employment. This role could usefully be expanded and taken up more broadly.
- Supports and resources are developed to enable Traveller organisations to play roles they deem to be appropriate in improving the labour market situation of Travellers. Travellers in employment demonstrated a marked commitment to support other Travellers in employment and to create fora for mutual support among Travellers in employment.

Link to report is available [here](#)

5.Older People and isolation

TILDA's recently completed a report called '*Altered Lives in a Time of Crisis*' which examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of older adults living in Ireland (2021) [here](#). Findings from this longitudinal study on ageing in Ireland highlighted that loneliness is associated with poorer overall Quality of Life. It states that the increased loneliness and social isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions will have negative consequences for the physical and mental wellbeing of older adult. Also, women and adults with a primary level of education and those who live alone are more likely to report the highest levels of stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms. It recommends that strategies to address the high levels of poor mental health among older adults in Ireland throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including the promotion and facilitation of physical activity, should be developed as a matter of urgency. The report also noted the caring role of older people during the COVID-19 pandemic, 15% of the population aged 60 and older, reported that they cared for someone. This is more than double the proportion (6%) who reported a caring role in 2018. [LINK](#) to the report.

The report goes on to highlight the changed level of activity of adults aged 60 years and older. Older people do the following activities less often as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic: 69% reported leaving the house less often than before the pandemic and 53% reported doing grocery shopping less often. Many participants reported not doing certain activities since the outbreak of COVID-19: travelling to visit family members (62%), travelling to visit friends (80%), attending religious services outside of the home (86%), and volunteering (81%).

According to another longitudinal study on ageing by TILDA and ALONE(2020) '*Loneliness and social isolation in the COVID-19 Pandemic among the over 70s*' highlighted that current measures such as social distancing and cocooning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were likely to increase level of loneliness and social isolation and this may have a negative effect on the wellbeing of older adults and recommends that public policies should be developed to ensure that these issues are addressed.

The report outlines factors which increase the risk of loneliness and social isolation which include functional limitations, widowhood, lower income, and lower levels of education. A report on loneliness and social isolation published by TILDA in 2019 found that both loneliness and social isolation are associated with poorer quality of life and other measures of wellbeing. Loneliness is not a necessary feature of ageing, however the COVID-19 pandemic, has made it more difficult to maintain regular connections, and may be expected to contribute to a rise in loneliness and social isolation among older adults. Here is the [LINK](#) to the report.

Other issues that arose for disadvantage individuals and especially older people during the pandemic was access to digital devices and knowledge around digital literacy. Prior to Covid-19, Age Actions reported in their briefing paper '*Supporting Older Peoples Digital Literacy*' (Jan 2020) that the majority of older people have never been online and digital literacy rates among older people in Ireland lag far behind our EU neighbours. They state that over half of Irish people aged between 65 and 74 have never used the internet, locking older people out of a huge range of benefits. It highlighted that 30% of Irish households are without internet due to the lack of skills to use it and without the ability to confidently navigate the internet, a significant proportion of our population are effectively barred from being fully engaged members of society. It noted that a lack of digital literacy has a huge impact on the ability to access services and information, to stay independent for longer, to save money, to participate in the development of national policy, teach and learn skills, and stay connected to community, culture and news. Here is the [LINK](#) to the briefing paper.

'Carrying Inequality-How Cumulative inequality impact on older people' an Age Action briefing paper from March 2020 states that making sure all older people have a good quality of life starts with giving people decent education, opportunities, working conditions and respect over the course of their lives.

Without these things, we risk disadvantages stacking up in later life. The paper states ‘that current disadvantages will lead to some people struggling more than others when they reach retirement age, through no fault of their own’. <https://www.ageaction.ie/how-we-can-help/campaigning-policy/briefing-papers>

The following is a summary of the number and percentage of People Over 65 years on the case load

Individuals Over 65 on the caseload	2021*	2020	2019	2018
Number	354	1096	1026	838
% caseload	4.3	4.2	3.3	2.6

*Data generated on 10/5/21

This table demonstrates that the percentage of people over 65 on the case load has increased since 2018 from 2.6% to 4.2%/4.3% in 2020/2021. Please note that the data for 2021 is up to 10th May only and -additional older people may have been supported under SICAP initiatives within non-caseload activity.

Programme Recommendation

It is recommended that the SICAP Programme prioritise supporting Older People with an emphasis on addressing isolation. The type of work could include initiatives to address loneliness, social isolation, promote well-being and opportunities for social interactions in the local community including addressing digital access and literacy.