



Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.

THE WHEEL'S SUBMISSION ON THE SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION PROGRAMME (SICAP) 2024

February 2023

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Introduction

About the Charity, Community and Voluntary, and Social Enterprise Sector in Ireland

Independent, community-based, voluntary organisations have long played a key role in supporting and advocating with and for people and communities in Ireland. Indeed, it is often through the initiative and advocacy of self-organising communities that many community, health and social care services have been initiated.

Community and voluntary organisations are involved in every community in the country, providing health and social supports, services and advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities, older people, young people, children, people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and people at every stage of their lives.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the extent to which we rely on the community and voluntary sector, especially in difficult times. These organisations played a key part in sustaining communities during the crisis, demonstrating their core role as part of Ireland's public service infrastructure. They restructured services to deliver remotely, responded to the need for socially-distanced and safe provision, cut costs, redirected resources to priority areas and designed new service responses targeted at meeting emergent need.

The community and voluntary sector constitutes a significant social economy within the broader economy. It comprises almost 35,000 community, voluntary and charitable organisations; involves over 86,481 volunteer directors and trustees; directly employs 165,000 people; and manages income of €14.2bn per year. These organisations raise over half of this income (more than €8.3bn) themselves, majorly subsidising the cost of public services in Ireland. Indecon Economic Consultants (in a report published by the Charities Regulator in 2018) estimate that the total direct, indirect, and induced value of the work of Ireland's charities exceed €24bn per annum and supports 289,000 employees.

About The Wheel

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises. We are the representative body for this vibrant and diverse sector and, together with our members, we shape and promote conditions in which people and their communities thrive.

We passionately believe that community and voluntary action improves and enriches communities and society. Our simple but ambitious mission is to make Ireland a fair and just place for all by strengthening the capacity and capability of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises to play their part. We do this by representing these organisations, supporting these organisations to do their work, and promoting the importance of the voluntarism and community values that power these organisations. The Wheel has more than 2,000 members and provides support services and representation on behalf of these members relating to matters that reflect their collective interests.

SICAP and the Community and Voluntary Sector

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is a vital programme for many of The Wheel's members, who work directly to tackle poverty and social exclusion. We appreciate this opportunity to engage with the Department of Rural and Community Development on design of the programme's next iteration.

Community and voluntary organisations are operating in an extremely challenging environment, facing the impacts of rising energy costs and inflation, as well as the continued societal effects of Covid-19. Many are at the frontline of providing supports and services for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Most organisations who rely on state funding, such as the SICAP scheme, are expected to provide the same level and quality of services and supports despite these significant challenges. It is vital that the Department of Rural and Community Development acknowledges the pressures faced by SICAP-funded community and voluntary organisations.

This submission will provide some general recommendations, under the most relevant headers, for how SICAP can function most effectively and support those organisations it funds to provide the best outcomes.

Recommendations for the Design of SICAP 2024

3.2 Horizontal Themes

There are three horizontal themes within the current SICAP programme, which cut across all Programme Implementers' work (see Appendix 1, section 1.3: SICAP Aim and Horizontal Themes).

Collaboration is one of the horizontal themes that underpins SICAP – what does and should effective collaboration look like in practice and how can the new SICAP programme ensure effective collaboration with target groups, representative organisations, local community groups and/ or other local service providers?

The Wheel supports the inclusion of collaboration as one of the horizontal themes of the SICAP programme. Engagement with those whom the scheme supports directly, and the organisations working closest to the ground, is vital to ensuring its effectiveness.

Collaboration is a key part of the Department of Rural and Community Development's own [Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector at a Local and National Level](#), which provides a positive framework for engagement between state funders and the community and voluntary sector.

The purpose of the document "is to provide an agreed set of values and principles that will underpin the relationships necessary at all levels to provide effective support to communities in particular the most disadvantaged and marginalised". The principles comprise: respect, subsidiarity, harmonisation, value for money, implementation and collaboration.

We recommend:

- **Integration of the Principles into the SICAP programme design in order to achieve effective collaboration with stakeholders going forward.**

3.5 Thematic Areas and Outcomes

Under the two core programme goals – supporting communities and supporting individuals – the current SICAP programme has 12 thematic areas and 29 associated outcomes, which form the basis of the Programme Monitoring Framework (see Appendix 1, section 1.7: SICAP Thematic Areas and Outcomes):

How could the new programme Monitoring Framework better capture programme outcomes, with due regard for the need for national level data on programme progress and achievement, as well as the need to limit the administration burden placed on programme implementers?

A thorough Monitoring Framework and KPIs are important to the effective running of any scheme such as SICAP. However, enhanced regulation and governance of the charity sector has placed increasingly onerous requirements on charity trustees and staff. The state rightly invested heavily in recent years in developing these regulations and compliance processes, including the Charities Regulator. However, there has been no equivalent investment to support the capacity of charities to comply. More pointedly, many funding programmes from state agencies specifically exclude use of any allocated monies for necessary compliance work associated with these contracts. In addition, expansion and duplication of reporting information across state bodies and agencies exacerbates the situation.

The Wheel's recent [member survey](#) shows that organisations across the sector must report a wide range of information to multiple statutory agencies and bodies. Two thirds of respondents were required to report the same compliance data to multiple sources, but only 30% of these respondents have dedicated compliance staff, demonstrating the significant challenge that these organisations face in meeting these requirements.

We recommend:

- **Ensuring that the monitoring framework does not create additional regulatory pressures for participating organisations, avoids duplication of information and seeks to capture the added value provided by the sector.**

3.9 Key Emerging Areas for Consideration

Social enterprise is a key and growing component of the current SICAP. What role should social enterprise play in the new SICAP programme?

Social enterprise is at the heart of the wider social economy in Ireland. In December 2021, the European Commission published the Social Economy Action Plan. For the first time, the EU Commission has provided a fully-inclusive definition of social economy, which comprises associations (including charities), social enterprises, cooperatives and mutual benefit societies. This reflects the existing diversity of the sector and describes a great many of The Wheel's members.

While this recognition is important, the need for supports and financing remain pressing concerns for many social economy organisations. The *National Social Enterprise Policy* acknowledges the need for a range of policy measures to assist with finance and business development for social enterprise, and there have been many learnings from the policy to date.

There are many social enterprises in Ireland whose objectives align with SICAP, and we therefore support this growing component of the programme. It is important to acknowledge, however, that it is not appropriate or desirable for all community and voluntary organisations to have a trading aspect to their work, and that these organisations continue to provide significant value. Furthermore, many organisations that do operate a social enterprise require support for the non-trading part of their work.

We recommend:

- **Continued support for social enterprise within the SICAP programme where it is appropriate and not at the expense of non-trading community organisations.**

Climate change initiatives and just transition (i.e. ensuring that the transition to a greener economy and society is carried out in an equitable manner) are emerging issues in society and are key national and European policy priorities. How should this be reflected in the new SICAP programme?

The *Climate Action Plan* acknowledges that climate justice must be a key priority for government and for all society as a matter of urgency. For many years, community and voluntary organisations have led the way on both advocacy and action in relation to climate issues and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Tackling climate crisis has been and will continue to be a ground-up movement led by communities who understand the necessity of drastically changing the way our economy and societal structures work. We must apply the "furthest-behind first" principle in line with the SDGs' aims. This is the only way to prevent further loss of local resilience, erosion of long-term sustainability and equality in communities, and catastrophic climate chaos for the most vulnerable now and in future generations.

Increasing support for robust participatory approaches is the only way to ensure the scale of the societal response will meet the scale of the challenge. This necessitates that community-led climate action is given a corresponding increase in the level of innovative and flexible funding, along with significant capacity-building resources.

We recommend:

- **Increasing the focus on community-led, climate justice initiatives within SICAP. Such an approach can release the latent potential in communities, which has already become visible in responses to the pandemic and the Ukraine crisis.**

As SICAP Programme Implementers are not public bodies, they are not legally required to implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. However, the Public Sector Duty has significant synergies with the community development approach and with SICAP's underpinning horizontal themes. Supporting capacity and implementation of the Public Sector Duty in community and voluntary organisations is also a stated action in Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: a 5-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland (2019-2024). How could capacity around and implementation of the Public Sector Duty be better promoted and supported in the new SICAP programme?

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty is an important directive, which ensures that the values embodied in programmes such as SICAP are reflected back onto the State. The availability of support and funding for training and skills development in the community and voluntary sector is far behind that of the public and private sectors. Many community and voluntary organisations lack the capacity to implement training and skills development for staff.

Any onus placed on SICAP-operating organisations to implement the Public Sector Duty must be facilitated through additional funding or capacity-building. It should also be acknowledged that many of the central tenets of the duty emerged from and continue to be practiced by community organisations, who are at the forefront of equality and human rights work in Ireland.

We recommend:

- **Supporting community and voluntary organisations to implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights duty by providing increased capacity or dedicated funding.**

Contact

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