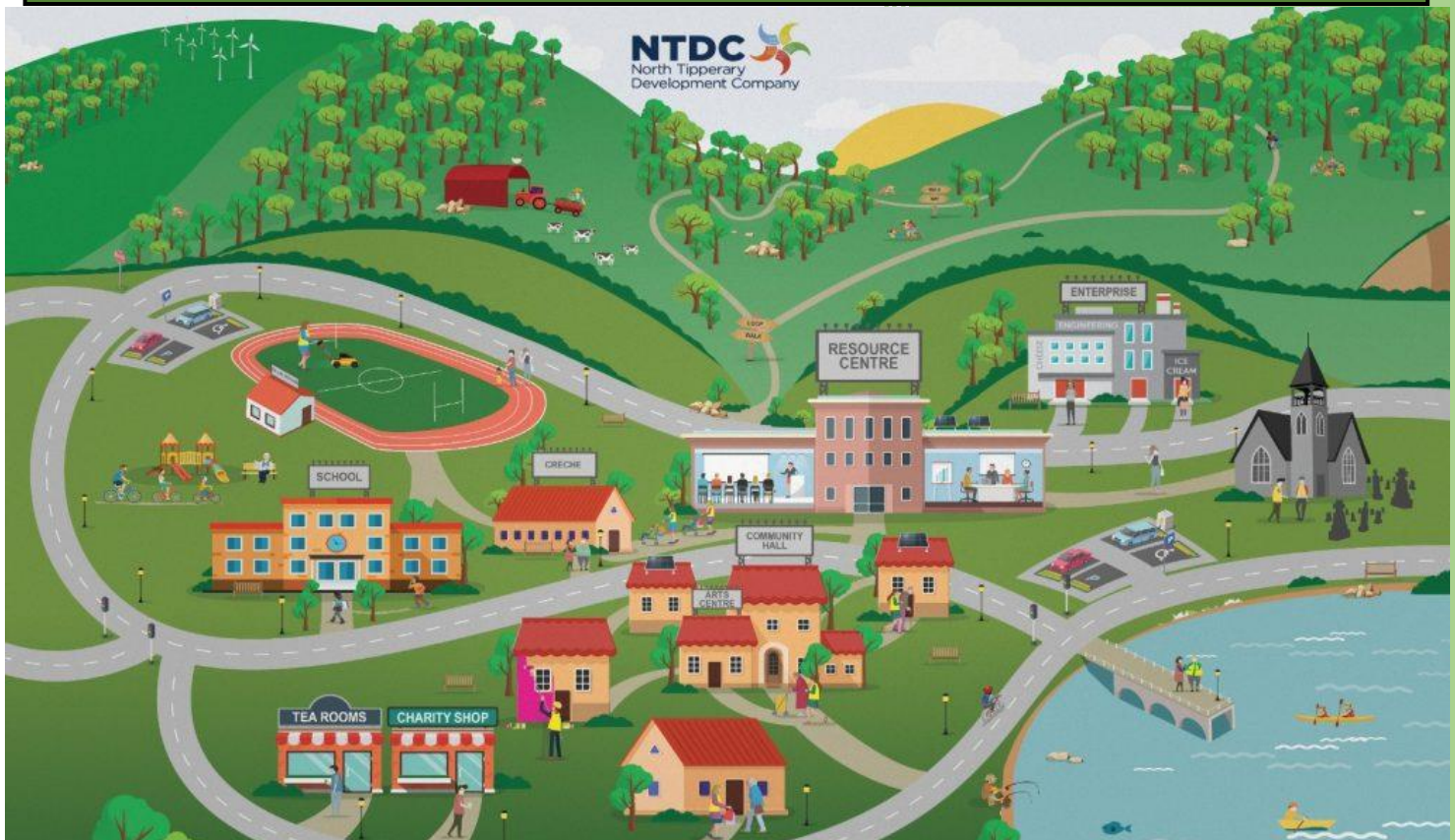




The Land of a Thousand Welcomes

Engaging with New Communities

North Tipperary Development Company (LOT 22-1)



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

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Introduction – New Communities

SICAP 2018-2021 describes new communities to include people who are migrants experiencing disadvantage, refugees, and asylum seekers and includes those living in direct provision. In April 2021, the central statistics office estimates immigration numbers into Ireland totalling 30,700 (*excluding UK immigrants*). This increase includes immigrants from EU countries and the rest of the world. According to the 2016 census figures Tipperary housed 15,856 migrants. Of NTDC’s lot figures for this year 113 individuals from New Communities target group were supported.

Target Group & Year	LOT 22-1 KPI 2	LOT 22-1 %KPI2	National KPI2%
New Communities 2018	75	13%	13%
New Communities 2019	79	15%	14%
New Communities 2020	108	21%	14%
New Communities 2021*	113	25%	13%

TABLE 1 - *Figure up until 8th Oct 2021

Pre SICAP 2018-2023, NTDC also led a Resettlement programme in Thurles that supported Syrian families to resettle in the Thurles community. This project worked collaboratively across multiple internal projects to ensure a wraparound delivery of services and supports for these families. The resettlement team also worked with external agencies to engage families in sustainable connections that would provide networks and links beyond the lifetime of the resettlement project. This programme experience provided the SICAP team with further insight and knowledge of the short to long term needs of these individuals and families, particularly in the context of needs after the resettlement programme and gaps in services available to them within their new community and the North Tipperary region.

NTDC’s SICAP team collaborated through many different engagement strategies, through research in gaining a better understanding of what nationalities and cultures were situated in our catchment areas of North Tipperary.

Following a review of the original Thurles Resettlement Network Group in 2020 and in light of new resettlement programmes across the county delivered by other agencies and the impact of COVID19 on this target group it was decided to establish a county wide steering group that would look at the wider needs of migrants. Tipperary County Council has now

taken over as lead in coordinating this working group as it links well with the development of the county migrant strategy.

North Tipperary Development Company has supported a total of 375 individuals from the New Communities target group of SICAP since the beginning of the current programme. These target numbers show a steady increase of supports provided to New Communities since 2018. (See Table 1) These individuals have gained supports throughout the many actions of our SICAP programme. Since the current SICAP Programme began individuals from the New Communities target group have:

- attended 83 courses
- engaged in community-based training
- engaged in online support and training
- engagements are across goal one and two actions

In 2021, individuals from new communities attended a total of 22 courses. Pre pandemic numbers of attendees of this target group was 8 courses attended in 2019. A good deal of this need came from our teams' interactions and individual follow ups in 2020. All training provided to the new communities had very positive feedback, on how the classes were easy to follow and the delivery of the training was at a level the participants could readily understand. Most participants stated they would recommend the training to friends and family. Although there was an evident dislike of attending training online, many of the participants sought additional training going forward and into 2021.

"It was fulfilled and an Avenue to loosen up despite it being virtual."

In 2021, NTDC's SICAP team worked closely with key stakeholders and agencies to support those in Direct Provision centres in Tipperary in empowering, promoting participation, and equality.

Issues to be addressed

In this case study we will explore the engagement strategies, collaboration, language barriers, participation throughout COVID and online engagement, feedback from participants, and an analysis of new communities participation across SICAP actions. Showcasing the experience in North Tipperary and where creative solutions have built meaningful engagement with new communities.

Actions, interventions & supports

Learning for life

In 2018, supports sought after by this target group involved English language supports along with soft training courses in confidence building, personal development and small numbers of individuals seeking credentials/tickets, needed to work in various industries and taking up places on our Kickstart your Own Business training. However, language barriers were quite significant in many circumstances. And there seemed to be hesitancy to engage from many of this cohort in specific areas of North Tipperary.

Engagement strategies over the course of this programme has seen our SICAP team train to gain knowledge in how best to engage and deliver supports to the many new communities in North Tipperary. One of these training workshops was the Intercultural Approaches Training, this provided the team a better understanding of the needs, and in many cases, the traumas our clientele from new communities seek to address. This in turn provided the team with a focused approach and a level of empathy necessary to best serve this target group while also providing insight into the different agencies available to collaborate with and refer individuals to, as needs were identified through the course of our work.

“I came to Borrisokane in December 2020 from Monasterevin and I was so overwhelmed by the reception I received in terms of integrating with the local community. The team have been in the forefront in making sure that we have access to available opportunities around North Tipperary.” Sabelo

Language has remained a significant barrier and because of this SICAP developed the Fáilte Isteach methods and approaches we now adopt today that were initially piloted pre SICAP 2018-2023. NTDC SICAP have continued to coordinate the Fáilte Isteach in collaboration with Third Age Ireland along with the Tipperary Volunteer centre for tutor volunteers, in delivering Conversation English classes for students and volunteering opportunities for the volunteers of our classes. The classes take the approach of a fun and interactive group, where the group play games and take part in fun and interesting activities. This gives students real-life experiences using their new language and putting it into practice. This approach has always been a huge success, allowing professionals and volunteers to gain a better understanding of the different cultures across communities.

For example, at Christmas time the group held a class Christmas party where everyone brought a native dish. This provided the space to gain multicultural knowledge on interesting recipes and methods of cooking while using English. NTDC's SICAP provide the Conversational English classes, where the students can build their vocabulary and practice pronunciation within their conversation, while building their confidence in this area. SICAP collaborate with the Tipperary Education & Training Board (TETB) referring individuals to English language supports, where the TETB provide training regarding the technical use of grammar, writing, and reading. Both the Failte Isteach and TETB English Language supports promote social inclusion in the



students' localities as they meet up with many other nationalities and make new friends from many countries. Including volunteers in the delivery of the conversational classes has created new networks for individuals to build local connections in their new community.

Activities and outreach has seen the Conversation English classes develop even further. When interacting with students, the volunteers and SICAP workers have gained insight into the needs presenting for this beneficiary. This has allowed the SICAP team to learn about their goals in life and what activities they enjoy taking part in that in turn has impacted our local response to supports made available. When it emerged that many of the students in Nenagh had an interest in Golf we organised a social event for the class and volunteers, that was supported by a volunteer Golf tutor. The activity was hugely successful as it brought many nationalities together and promoted the social inclusion element of SICAP supports. As the day progressed it was evident that this activity was truly taking us from a classroom-based learning activity and broke down some student and teacher aspects of the relationships, which we did not realise were there. The group bonded on a different level, exchanging



phone numbers and planning activities together outside of their English classes. Some of the group spoke about their career goals, their future of getting married and others spoke more freely of how their lives had changed since moving to Ireland. Some students spoke of their dream of going to college and maybe even starting their own business as a personal trainer. Another of the group spoke of their past job in his own country where he was a prison warden, and that he would love to work in this area in Ireland even though during class time, he had stated he was looking for a job in the local petrol station, washing cars.

This highlighted that for many of the group engaged the need to have a blended social and classroom-based approach gave space for deeper connections and honesty across the group regarding individual needs.

Following on from this all SICAP supports and wrap around services were discussed and made available in enabling the students of conversational English classes to progress and develop in their lives and careers of choice rather than taking up low paid employment and settling for low skilled labour. With this information our classes incorporated all SICAP supports into our English classes for a time, advertising Work Planning and career supports, Enterprise supports, Work Readiness Supports and further educational opportunities for the new communities. Included were college prospectuses to discuss in classes and to link with third level education and the, QQI level training available to them with the TETB.



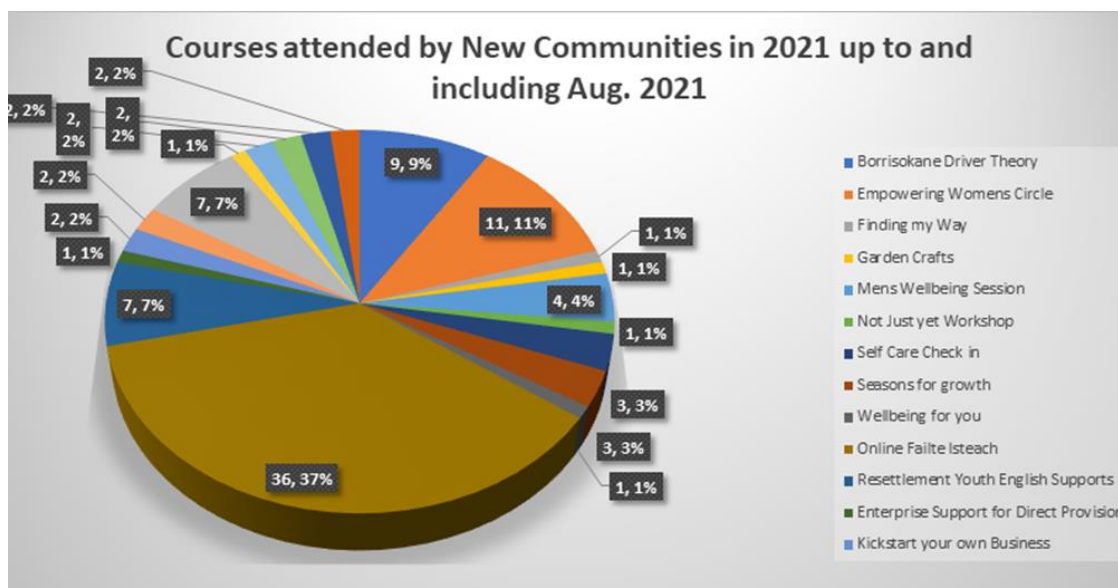


Table 2 – 2021 Courses attended by the target group New Communities

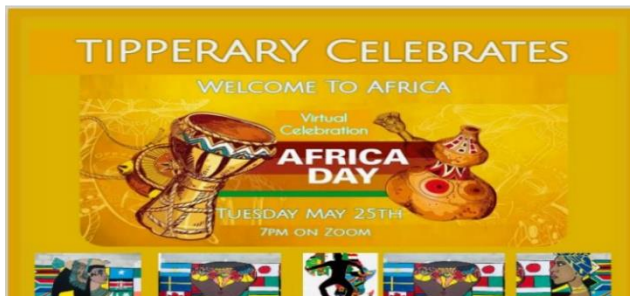
Work Planning & Career Supports

As SICAP supports were sought from participants, 2019 SICAP’s action Work Planning and Career Support worked collaboratively with Tus Supervisors in the Thurles area who needed assistance in connecting with members of the Syrian Community regarding work placements. SICAP provided a translator to assist with Tus Assessment interviews, placements and follow up. As a result, 3 clients were set up on TUS placements in Thurles later that year. In early 2020, SICAP, Tus and a translator worked together on designing a programme called Work Preparedness and Integration which was to be rolled out with a small group of Syrian Women in Thurles. This was to include awareness of supports, services and developing job search skills. COVID 19 restrictions challenged the continuity of this initiative, as although a first meeting took place in February 2020, no further meetings were possible due to Covid 19 lockdown restrictions. The translator-maintained contact with the group via WhatsApp, phone calls and emails but engagement was low, and participants expressed a preference to meet as a group. The translator had a great rapport with participants and her involvement was a huge help to the Tus supervisors in reaching out to the Syrian community in Thurles and working with participants who were placed on the scheme.

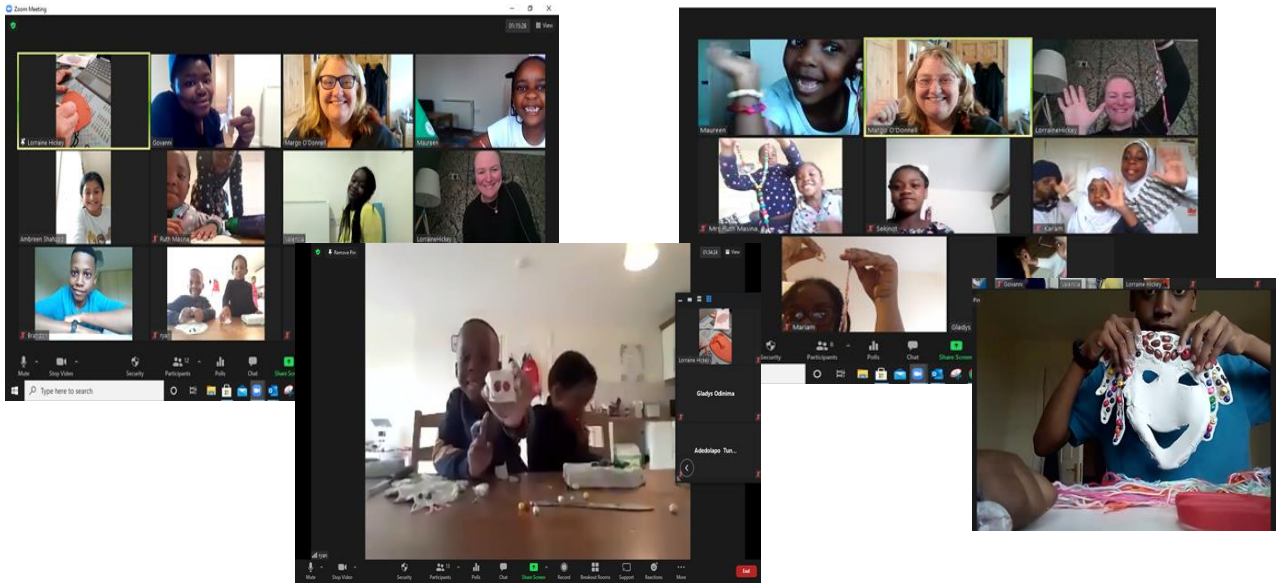
In 2020, Digital Skills training to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Roscrea and Borrissleigh was provided. Interpretation support was provided as part of this training to clients from emergency accommodation in Roscrea. The course covered CV & Interview preparation and online job search methods and was delivered online.

Empowering Communities

To celebrate Africa Day 2021, NTDC's SICAP team collaborated with Tipperary County Council, Irish Aid & representatives of the African community resident throughout North Tipperary in promoting Africa Day across the county. An application for funding was successful with Tipperary County Council and €1000 allocated to the event running cost, managed by NTDC. The SICAP team reached out to the African



Community and invited people to a working group zoom call where the community decided on the activities they wanted to do - a cookery demonstration, a poem about Table Mountain written for this occasion, young people did traditional dances, African tribal drums were played, and people spoke about their experiences of growing up in Africa and how living in Ireland was for them. There were t shirts designed by members of the working group, which was printed locally and worn by the various working group members and their families on the zoom. The MC for the night was shared by 2 South African men, the zoom was well attended by 40 plus people. The audience gave very positive feedback, and the working group were extremely happy with the outcome. The poster for the event was designed by a working group member and included photos of a wall mural. The promotion of African culture in local shop windows was led by four of the working group where they organised the set up and dressing of the windows in the towns of Borrissokane and Roscrea using cultural items donated from African people living in North Tipperary.



The working group also coordinated the delivery of three craft zoom workshops for African children, young people, and parents. These workshops gave opportunities for social engagement and to learn crafting and to create and design using their own cultural creativity.

Work Readiness

Collaborations with the TETB provided training to the new community's target group in areas such as Construction Skills, TIG welding, Primary Food Safety training and ECDL. Individuals were supported through the ETB registration process in gaining access to the training. Vital to the success of the work readiness supports was the interactions with the direct provision staff. Through this process the individuals from the new communities were informed of training opportunities and were able to request specific training to assist getting them back to work or reallocating to essential services during the COVID pandemic. The collaboration between SICAP and the support workers of the direct provision ensured individuals had transport to training venues. This was a significant supporting factor to the new communities in gaining some of the supports under this action.

Many of individuals from new communities' target that engaged in training accessed Safe Pass training, online Security Skills training and Primary Food safety & HACCP training. Most of these participants gained full time employment after the training they received, with others securing part time work. To date, a total of 22 individuals from this target group progressed into employment. An additional 12 individuals created their own employment opportunities through our SICAP Enterprise supports.

“After we moved to the Roscrea, we met NTDC, who supported us on several sectors, psychologically through yoga classes and mental health workshops which helped me a lot to skip the difficult situations I lived since we left our home, and then the worst loss to me was my mother and father death. Linguistically through English language courses (in person conversation and online via zoom), and many activities such as painting, pottery and handicrafts..., And the supportive courses such as the safe pass that my husband benefited from, digital skills, driving lessons... in addition to her support during the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. And the social activities organized in the youth club for adult and kids, which made our daughter happy and feel contentment”. Jamal

Youth Development

SICAP collaborated with Youth Work Ireland, in supporting the Syrian families relocated to Nenagh and Templemore through the Resettlement Programme. When speaking with the resettlement worker who knew the families and their needs very well it was identified that an English language class specifically for young adults who were attending secondary school in Templemore and Nenagh was urgently needed as the young people were struggling in school and were at risk of dropping out. A pilot Teenage Conversation English Classes ran online via zoom from February 2021 it was noted that there was a marked decrease in attendance after the Midterm break. The plan was reviewed, and it was agreed that by bringing the classes into a classroom environment it would increase attendance and thus increase learning. This fell under the essential work through Youth targeting most at risk young people. The classes continued in person until May and attendance was back to 100%. Feedback from the students on the classes was very positive and they preferred the in-person classes. Collaboration between the different supports of NTDC has seen communication improved between parents and schools in relation to their children, where parents have sought to improve their conversation English, in enabling them to better inform the schools of their children’s needs.

“I have attended several workshops run by NTDC and SICAP, and I found them to be very beneficial. I've learnt a lot and in these last ones, I had the pleasure to do a session with my kids. It was a great experience and enhanced family time.”

Following on from the engagement in the Pilot Teenage Conversation Classes and the success of Africa Day individuals living in Direct Provision expressed an interest in getting the opportunity to integrate into the Community of Borrisokane through sport. SICAP supported this integration through collaborating with the local GAA Club, Elvery's Intersport Nenagh, & Cathal Bourke sports Borrisoleigh and Tipperary County Council to provide Sports Gear to the youth who sought to join the Borrisokane GAA club. While in process, this initiative gained significant support of the Borrisokane GAA Hurling team who waved any fees associated for young people's membership costs of the club. This initiative was supported by Tipperary County Council under the Migration strategy and SICAP. As a result of this collaboration, nine young people received, Hurley's, helmets, shin guards, gum shields, hurling boots, socks and T-shirts with Borrisokane hurling crest. This project has supported local families to create further connections and opportunities for cultural connections with the families living in Direct Provision, creating a sense of belonging for new communities within existing rural communities.

Personal Development

This year Goal two supports started off with Self Care Wellness Check in as a response to the Stress Management course ran in November 2020. The Personal Development action of our programme proved to be of great interest to individuals from various migrant communities in 2021. This action focuses on creating holistic, person centred supports which help people in their personal development and wellbeing. To date our experience in creating, facilitating, and delivering workshops for individuals to progress personally, based on awareness, values, reflection, goal setting within the context of health and wellbeing, education, relationship, self-improvement. This along with employment has proved very successful in supporting some of our most marginalised groups in society to engage in meaningful and at times long term support at community level.

“Thank you for all the support my children, myself and the families at the centre are receiving from you. Thanks to you, I could attend courses that really improved my mental well-being. I could further my education; my children and I are having great fun



with the events and activities that you organise. We are blessed to have your support at all times. Thank you very much.” Bibi.

Through the community Outreach and engagement in Direct provision Centres in North Tipperary, SICAP ran additional personal development courses in 2021 which supported the needs identified by the community. The courses were run mainly in relation to promoting positive mental health and National Women’s Day. Unfortunately, much of this training took place online as restrictions continued throughout 2021. Some of the successful online



engagements included:

- ✓ Garden Crafts
- ✓ Not just Yet
- ✓ Finding my way
- ✓ Wellbeing for you
- ✓ Women’s circle
- ✓ Driver Theory
- ✓ Empowering Women’s circle
- ✓ Seasons for Growth
- ✓ Men’s Well being

Challenges

The COVID 19 pandemic brought huge challenges to the Fáilte Isteach Classes. Classes were moved online as demand continued to grow from existing and new non English speaking individuals. This brought with it new barriers including: no IT equipment, poor internet connectivity, and lack of online knowledge. This impacted both volunteers and students, in particular those living in Direct Provision centres and those working in industry experiencing COVID clusters. Online training focused on supporting those engaged in understanding the lockdown restrictions and how to stay safe in their communities, living spaces and work. Community Outreach was undertaken in Roscrea, Newport and Borrisokane. This was carried out through SICAP workers going to direct provision centres and communities to establish relationships with the individuals and families. The SICAP team also distributed flyers and posters into ethnic businesses and local shops in North Tipperary to advertise services, courses and company supports. This COVID Community call outreach was quite time consuming and difficult due to COVID restrictions.

As 2021 began increased requests for supports to new communities was evident, indicating an increased awareness of the SICAP supports available and the local connection to development workers. Through the increased marketing and COVID19 community response promotion material our online visibility & diverse engagement strategies impacted positively on many of this target group. It became clear from the expression of interest engagement online that many expressed a need for positive mental health and wellbeing courses, conversation English classes, and employment related training. While this was very positive, engagement through online platforms, as COVID 19 restrictions continued, was a significant barrier. The registration and data consent process proved to be quite challenging. This process was extremely difficult as we could not meet face to face with individuals from this target group who had limited or no English. Pre pandemic, development workers could sit with clients and translate the registration forms through the aid of friends, family or even a translator. However, trying to register non-English-speaking individuals over the phone proved extremely difficult and, in some cases, impossible. In response to this the SICAP team developed an online registration form for clients to fill. The form was made available to our team through Microsoft 365 Forms app.

This allowed the team to draft the data consent and registration forms while including the multilingual option where the forms can be translated into many different languages.

“My family and I came to Roscrea town in an area I had never known before. Everything was difficult for me, and my family. I was in a world where only birds were my friends. But suddenly I know everything changes with [SICAP] changed my daily routine, was an angel for me, which greatly influenced my integration into the community. I know many people, I started to be active in yoga in the morning... English language study where I learned the first words to communicate with people. Integration in volunteer work where I know many wonderful people. Everything came from you... to be very grateful me and my family... God bless you and your wonderful work.”

While every effort was made to engage with new communities there were still barriers to their participation which went much further than translating reading material. This target group always struggled with access to transport, an ongoing issue for many people living in rural Ireland. The SICAP team found that many of this cohort needed online supports in

accessing the online training available to them. In response, the SICAP team conducted over the phone tutorials on how to install zoom and use the app. SICAP team members also conducted one to one meetings on zoom to assess individuals level of English capabilities so they could attend the online Conversation English classes. Where possible development workers with experience in this area and the use of texting the client when stuck (so their phone could translate for them), allowed these meetings to become a successful form of engagement with individuals. The use of online books, sourced through collaborations with Fáilte Isteach, also proved a useful tool in assessing the student's level of English.

Cultural barriers existed when engaging with the Syrian community. This proved challenging when looking to target women in supports. Through translated conversations the need for women only engagement was identified. Additional barriers regarding childcare arose, however limited resources and time constraints meant a specific women's Conversation English Class could not be facilitated. It is hoped solutions will be found now that COVID restrictions are lifting making community spaces more accessible and where schools and community childcare facilities are available to support these women in engaging with SICAP supports.

Other challenges and barriers to engagement beyond language barriers was the limited access to tech resources, limited data/broadband access and unsuitable living arrangements for those in shared accommodation that is typical of Direct Provision or migrant workers engaged in factory work.

During the online failte Isteach classes new difficulties arose where students became frustrated and irate at the speed of the class, difficulty hearing or understanding tutors and volunteers, background noise interfering, tutors limited experience in using online platforms to deliver classes. Some cultures found these issues too difficult to tolerate and patience for some was a difficulty. This impacted on group engagement and interaction. Measures put in place to support this involved further one to one call support between the SICAP development worker and the student however this duplicated much of the workload.

Many of those living in direct provision struggle to get meaningful work and come from educated and experienced careers however due to the limitations put on their integration in rural Ireland and logistical and cultural barriers they remain out of work and stuck in the system.

“I have a degree in Marketing and Business from Africa, but here I can’t get work, I am training now to work in community development as I have volunteered with many community projects to support integration and I feel passionate about helping people like me and the communities in Ireland to work better together. I can do this as I am lucky to have access to a car.”

In summary, there continues to be challenges in supporting new communities that at times lie outside of SICAP; however, NTDC has creatively and practically managed the logistical challenges where possible and without the flexible, needs led approach that SICAP offers this target group would continue to experience marginalisation.

Conclusion

The steady development of long-term engagement with new communities has provided SICAP with the capacity to meet the needs of the different migrant communities that live in North Tipperary. The diversity of engagement across the different goals and actions has given SICAP the space to develop needs led interventions with New Communities with particular attention on those living in Direct Provision and enhanced awareness of the complexities that exist for this target group within Irish Society and rural Ireland.

Going forward it is clear that support to new communities has increased and that there are significant needs presenting in this target group. It is important that the voice of new communities continues to be heard and that those most marginalised within this target group continue to be supported to engage in community life. The Tipperary Migrant Strategy and the newly reformed Tipperary County Migrant Steering group will create space for informed, resourced, and targeted supports to be created, sustained, or improved to meet the needs of our new communities.

Finally, following the SICAP Mid Programme Review there will be further space for bespoke targeted actions, projects, and collaborations to be developed to address the needs presenting for migrant communities, in particular those living in direct provision. Continued engagement with regional and national stakeholders to address the recurring barriers to engaging in community, education and employment opportunities need to be action led to ensure that the talented individuals that live within the direct provision service can engage in Irish society and contribute their skills within their new communities.