



LDC: West Limerick Resources CLG

CAB: Limerick West Rural (21-2)

Title: Creating Community: West Limerick Migrant Network in Action

Thematic focus area: Refugee and migrant rights and integration

Core area of work: (Goal 1) 2. Supporting Local Community Groups, Social Enterprises and Networks – evident in our work in *Action A2405 Community Networks & Strategic Collaborations*.



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**Social Inclusion &
Community Activation
Programme**

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is co-funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the European Social Fund Plus under the Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) Programme 2021 -2027

Background

West Limerick Resources and the West Limerick community have for many years welcomed refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and more recently the movement of people under temporary protection due to the war in Ukraine. In 2016, West Limerick Resources was responsible for rolling out the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Program, which marked a turning point in creating strategic responses to integration. Our SICAP Community Development Worker Stefanie Jaeger Liston, a migrant herself recognised the importance of community integration from both sides and set about building capacity with individuals across the West Limerick community.

What she identified early on through her work in SICAP was the limited options for refugees, migrants or any new arrivals to the community to have a safe space to meet but also to participate in the Community. The risk was that the migrants and refugees would remain on the margins or become ghettoised in the community. It was important to include migrant communities in planning and decision-making processes to ensure accurate translation of their needs and appropriate responses.

Factors that affected participation and inhibited refugees and migrants having a voice included language barriers, cultural differences, lack of accessible information, fear of 'the new', adjusting to a new way of life. While our SICAP community development worker worked with the migrant communities, supporting them, advocating for them when possible, she understood that they would need to find their voice and begin to advocate for themselves. She then worked towards building the foundation for networking opportunities, in bringing people together, building on the strengths from within.

Response:

Following the capacity building work, an attempt was made in 2019 to establish a Network under Goal 1 of the programme. This was short lived due to Covid-19 pandemic. The network in its current form was re-established in 2023, following several failed initial attempts, the SICAP worker reverted to meeting people at an individual level again to provide more information on what the Network could be. Individual interventions as encouraged by the programme have the strongest outcomes. After a well facilitated group meeting, the network began to take shape. Today it consists of 10 members from 10 different countries including Armenia, Afghanistan, Moldova, Poland and Syria to name a few. Members all bring in their different cultures and traditions and ideas to work towards building a presence and a recognised entity in the community.

'I think it's a place where we can come, because we as migrants have this unique perspective, we have the challenges that maybe people that work here or live here, don't even recognise. We can support each other, brainstorm ideas, we can talk about experiences, we don't feel so isolated. We feel part of the group and we can organise things for other people in the community, we feel needed'

~ Karolina Ciucias, Member of the West Limerick Migrant Network ~

One of the Network's focus is for the members to plan and deliver events and activities for the migrant community, and not be reliant on SICAP staff. It is an enabling process, making the members the decision makers and drivers of change. It was also an opportunity for the migrant and refugee communities to showcase and utilise their skills. The members of the network have a very diverse skill set, be it singing, cooking, dancing, organising and crafting, you name it the Network has it. The Migrant Network developed under SICAP Action A2405 *Community Networks and Strategic Collaborations*, gives a very diverse group of people the opportunity and a platform to explore their different traditions and ideas and bring them together with outcomes in *1.2 New Local Community Groups, Social Enterprises and Networks are formed and 2.2 SICAP target groups are represented and participate in decision-making spaces that affect them.*

Inclusion Focus

The main aim of the network is to make West Limerick a more inclusive and diverse society and encourage migrant participation in the community, while showcasing and utilising the many skills that migrants bring. Another key action of the migrant network is to put out positive messages on migration and what benefits it can bring to a community, the richness of diversity, new ideas and cultural integration. The rise in anti-immigrant sentiment at the moment is dark and threatening. So, the Network agrees it is really, really important to promote positive engagement with the community.

Feedback from our community has been very positive. People are generally very interested in finding out about other cultures once you give them the opportunity. Through wider SICAP networking a number of intercultural events like craft workshops were delivered. The traditional Ukrainian Pysanky Easter egg painting facilitated by the Ukrainian Community or the making of the St. Bridget's Cross facilitated by the Newcastle West Shed. SICAP has built strong collaboration with the Women's Sheds in West Limerick, and they in turn have worked with us to further our social inclusion agenda, creating community integration.



The International Holiday Fair in 2023, planned and delivered by the Network saw over 300 people from across the community attending. The day was structured around food, music, dancing reflecting the cultures within the Network and gave the community a deeper understanding of new cultural experiences. The event recognised the Network as an established entity, a vehicle

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for change working for all those newly arrived in West Limerick. This event provided the Network with a template to work from for future event planning.

‘The big activities we did like last, last Christmas, we did a lot of food. They bring some food..... I like to put all my feeling, love in my food. I love people, that I'm feeling happy to... to see people tummies is full, you know and they're happy to eat my food’.

~ Maral Geloyain, Member of the West Limerick Migrant Network ~

Developments & Events:



2024 has been a very busy year for the Network, participating in its first Saint Patrick's Day parade in Newcastle West and a lot of other migrants joined enroute. This was a very strong statement on that particular day, where we are all celebrating our nationality and culture. The Network has created its own logo, so that it is recognisable and strengthens its identity in the community. SICAP funded the printing costs for the banner which is used now for all events.

International Children's Day

A Family Day for International Children's Day was planned and delivered with SICAP funding utilised, and it had a great attendance by communities from all over the world. Sowing the seeds of integration at an early age supports stronger social inclusion. All activities were planned and facilitated by members of the network. This further highlighted the similarities we share as community games such as the egg and spoon race were a popular game played in most countries.

Voter Workshops

‘I understood my thinking, my opinion was same level like Irish people, so I was very happy I could participate and make correct decisions. Thank you very much for giving me the chance to be trained as it's very importantI think ...more people have to participate in this kind of training.

~ Alina Ciobanu, Member of the West Limerick Migrant Network ~

Critical to building and strengthening the voice of migrants and refugees and promoting equality the Network organised Voter Education Programme workshops locally. The workshops were funded though SICAP and delivered by Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC) in our SICAP outreach Hub.



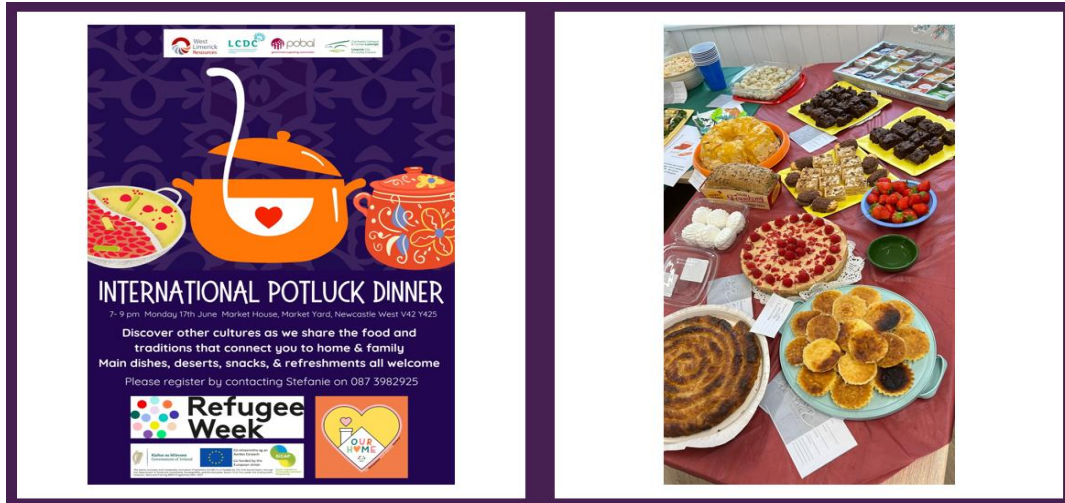
The focus was on migrant engagement and to strengthen their understanding of the Irish voting system and the fact that they are entitled to vote at local elections and have their voice heard. A very strong step in strengthening integration and active citizenship.

National Refugee Week 2024 – International Potluck Dinner

‘There is more that unites us, than divides us’

~ Kofi Annan ~

The Network was instrumental in promoting and celebrating National Refugee Week 2024, by organising International Potluck Dinner. Members used their culinary skills to celebrate diversity, to raise awareness of opportunities for refugees, migrants to participate in community events and to be welcomed. Simple yet effective methods of integration, over 40 people eating together, sharing and celebrating cultural experiences.



Strategic Collaboration

Members attended the launch of the Limerick Migrant Integration Forum in the Council Chambers of Limerick City & County Council in March this year. The Limerick Migrant Integration Forum was established by Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) as part of the EU INTEgreat Project in partnership with Doras. The Forum aims to empower migrant communities in Limerick to collaborate, and promote social inclusion, integration and active participation in key decision-making bodies and networks in the region. It was an opportunity for members of the West

Limerick Migrant Network to learn about other, more elaborate networks and explore potential opportunities for development.



Challenges & Direction:

At the moment, only women are represented in the network, and this is an ongoing area for development; to bring a gender balance and a new dynamic to the group. While the work of the Network initially has focused on families and integration, we also want to extend the remit to ensure that older people and individuals also see a place for themselves in the Network.

Equally while SICAP has supported the development of the Network, the ownership and future direction now must come from the members. Work is underway, to ensure the structure and sustainability of the group outside of SICAP. An independent facilitator will work with the group in early 2025 to agree their Terms of Reference (TOR) as they journey forward.

Lessons Learned:

Investing **time** in people, particularly where there is a diverse range of voices to be heard while **building trust** and **capacity** at individual level is paramount in SICAP. Once this has been established, it becomes easier to work with people on broader ideas and opportunities. The individuals we support under Goal 2 are now working with us in actions in Goal 1. This demonstrates the **breadth of the programme** and how exactly beneficiaries should be moving through the programme. Supporting people to have a space and a voice creates stronger communities, it underpins greater social inclusion and leads to a more culturally aware community.

Identifying **commonalities**, **building opportunities** with existing community groups, social enterprises or networks strengthens the sense of community for everybody. The **flexibility** of the SICAP programme allows for **creative** and **innovative responses**. Supporting a range of simple activities, this year has given the Network every opportunity to **develop**, to understand the potential possibilities for future projects while becoming the vehicle for creating community for refugees and migrants across West Limerick.