



Crowe Horwath®



Summary Report:

**Key Themes arising from the Consultation Process
with SICAP Stakeholders to Inform the Development
of SICAP 2018-2022**

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**Department of Rural and
Community Development**

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1 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

This report summarises the discussion and opinions arising from a consultation process on the future of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), comprising four national and regional consultation events, surveys, and focus groups.

1.2 Overview of the Process

1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of engaging an independent facilitator was to provide an environment in which participants could openly discuss any issues. The process outlined below was structured to give participants an opportunity to discuss any perceived issues with the current programme and ideas for the development of the next iteration of the programme. Utilising the resources of an independent facilitator ensured that there was a greater level of objectivity.

This process was not an evaluation of the current SICAP programme. Other pieces of work have been undertaken by others in relation to evaluating the current programme. Approximately 730 people engaged with the process through the national and regional events, surveys, and focus groups.

1.2.2 National Consultation Event

The first consultation event was the national SICAP consultation event held in Dublin Castle on 24 February 2017. Approximately 130 people attended the event, which comprised an opening session with introductory speeches by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government¹, the Minister of State for Communities and Drugs Catherine Byrne T.D., and by Crowe Horwath. Following this, the attendees split up into a number of breakout groups to discuss a series of key thematic areas relating to SICAP. These sessions were followed by a reportage by participants from each breakout group and a plenary discussion before finishing with a lunch for attendees.

¹ The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government at the time had responsibility for SICAP; however, a new Department of Rural and Community Development was subsequently established. SICAP now comes under the auspices of this Department, and all responsibility for the Programme rests with it. Hence, throughout the report, we will refer to the Department of Rural and Community Development rather than the Department formerly responsible for SICAP.

1.2.3 Regional Consultation Events

Following the national event, further consultation events were held in Sligo, Cork, and Dublin, on 10th, 24th, and 29th March 2017 respectively. The Sligo event had approximately 65 attendees; 52 people attended the Cork session; and the Dublin regional event had around 74 who attended. The regional events were conducted in a similar fashion to the national event, splitting into breakout sessions after introductions by the Minister and the Department; however, owing to lower numbers, the sessions considered two thematic areas each rather than a single discussion topic.

1.2.4 Surveys

Pobal conducted two surveys, one directed at programme implementers (PIs) and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), and one at a wider range of stakeholders. The results of the surveys were analysed on a thematic basis to inform the final report.

1.2.5 Focus Groups

Focus groups/engagements were held with four cohorts of stakeholders:

- Representatives from Department of Rural and Community Development and from Pobal, in respect of their roles in designing, implementing, funding, and overseeing the SICAP programme;
- Stakeholders from statutory and other agencies involved in employment, education, and enterprise;
- Representatives from the community development and social inclusion sectors;
- SICAP beneficiaries.

1.3 Development of the Final Report

This summary report to the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal combines the outputs from all of the above consultations and summarises the findings thematically.

1.4 Content of this Report

The primary purpose of this report is to summarise the main issues reported to us during an extensive consultation programme. This report is a summary of the principal themes distilled from consultations in various forms with hundreds of contributors and as such does not purport to set out all individual views expressed within the process, but rather the consolidated priorities as identified over the various engagements.

It is necessary to note that the priorities of SICAP itself, as the programme currently exists, were formulated in 2014 and as such were in response to the specific economic situation of that time. For example, unemployment in the first quarter of that year was around 12%, and thus there was a strong emphasis on activation.

While there were positive comments made about SICAP, with it being generally seen as a key programme at local level, due to the nature of this report the main emphasis is on aspects of the programme that are considered to be problematic or in need of strengthening or refinement.

We should also point out that the views, opinions and suggestions of consultees presented in this report are not those of Crowe Horwath. Our job has been to ask the questions, probe the responses, and – we hope – capture fairly the feedback received so that it can be considered by the Department and Pobal as they prepare for the next iteration of SICAP.

2 Principal Themes

2.1 Overview

The following themes represent the most substantial and repeated issues raised by those consulted in relation to the development of the next SICAP programme. The themes set out below are a cross-cutting set of issues and suggestions for what participants would like to see in the forthcoming SICAP programme 2018 - 2022.

2.2 Greater Clarity about the Programme

A common theme across the consultations and thematic areas discussed in the various engagements was the desire to see the next iteration of SICAP as one with greater clarity about its role, purpose, and in particular its differentiation from other supports and programmes delivered in relation to supporting people and communities in difficult or marginalised circumstances.

Participants expressed the desire to see **a clear definition in relation to SICAP**, the terminology used within it (for example, what “social inclusion” and “community development” mean in the context of this particular programme), its particular and individual role and intended impact, and how this programme fits within the wider landscape of statutory and voluntary agencies and supports.

This desire for clarity arose from **perceptions of overlapping and duplicated roles and activities** in some areas between SICAP and the work of other agencies and programmes. It was also cited in respect of the selection of target groups, with the question raised about determining at the outset in a clear fashion what the programme is intended to achieve, and using this as the basis for designing the implementation.

This concern is related to the desire among many participants to “refocus” (as they perceive it) the SICAP programme on **core areas of social inclusion and community development**. It was also closely allied to a decline in the numbers of those in unemployment, thereby conceivably reducing the requirement for SICAP to continue to focus on this area and necessitating a fresh definition and specification as to the nature and purpose of the programme. Participants are keen to see a clearly defined programme for the next iteration.

The theme of clarity extends to a **perceived lack of definition of the roles of the various actors within the programme**, such as the remit and responsibilities of LCDCs and the role of Pobal. Participants perceived that the role of the LCDCs in the current programme was unclear in the absence of LCDC involvement in the setting of local priorities or targets.

Clarity around the **intended impact of SICAP** would also be helpful, according to participants, in the determination of the targets and indicators for the next programme. A lack of clarity was perceived in how the existing targets were determined and this has contributed to a concern about the target-driven nature of the current programme as stakeholders perceive it.

The greater clarity would, it was believed, **better support the integration and alignment of SICAP with the work of other agencies and programmes**: if the differentiated roles and purposes of the various supports are clear to all stakeholders, then, it was suggested, the capacity to work together in a complementary way rather than a “competitive” one would be significantly enhanced.

2.3 More Local Autonomy and Flexibility

A very strong theme emerging from the consultations was the desire to see the next iteration of SICAP have the **capacity to allow for local autonomy and flexibility in the implementation of the programme**. Participants felt strongly that the next SICAP programme would be enhanced by having the capacity to respond most appropriately to the needs of the local area. Mechanisms should be developed within the next programme to allow for local input, via the LCDCs, into the identification of needs, prioritisation of responses, identification of key target groups, and the appropriate performance indicators and targets for the programme in each area.

There is a perception that the current iteration of SICAP is inflexible and prescriptive, with targets set nationally without reference to the differing issues and needs within local communities. It is felt that there is a **valuable role for the local stakeholders to play in making the SICAP programme as effective as possible** in each area, by utilising the local knowledge to identify the target groups, communities, and individuals most in need of the supports under the programme.

A common aspect of this theme is the concern in relation to the role of the LCDCs, which have to hold to account the Programme Implementers for the implementation of the programme against targets that the LCDC does not have any role in setting. It was frequently expressed that there **should be more autonomy at local level in the implementation of SICAP** in future.

The **flexibility to meet changing and emerging needs locally** was also cited as a key reason for the desire to see the next programme becoming more flexible. Participants would like the capacity for LCDCs and PIs to agree how and where to direct the resources in a flexible way over the duration of the programme.

Another particular issue that underpinned the call for more localisation of the programme was the **difference between urban and rural areas** in terms of the social inclusion needs. Participants highlighted, for example, the dispersed populations in rural areas, with challenges such as infrastructure deficits and lack of

public transport, as issues particular to some LCDC areas, with others facing specific issues relating to urban areas, such as particular difficulty in accessing housing.

The desire for **local flexibility and input to the identification of target groups** for SICAP was a strong theme, with consultees calling for at least a partial role for LCDCs, informed by PI experience, in the identification of the key target groups for their particular areas. This was tempered by the need, acknowledged in the consultations, to ensure that marginalised groups (such as those in the Traveller community) were not excluded from the local implementation of SICAP.

The capacity to be **more flexible in terms of the budget allocation** across the programme Goals was called for by many participants. It was felt that the differing needs in local areas should be able to be responded to in a more tailored way, by allowing local areas to flex the allocation of budgets and resources according to the key needs rather than on a fixed basis set nationally without the capacity to review at local level.

The perceived lack of flexibility in the current programme is considered by many to be a **hindrance to innovation and improvement**, as there is felt to be little room within the programme design and targets to allow for trying new things.

2.4 Less Driven by Targets and Quantitative Reporting

Participants within the consultation process expressed a desire to see the next iteration of SICAP designed in such a way as to **reduce the focus on numeric targets**, which in the current programme are perceived by many contributors to be very high and not tailored to the local circumstances.

There is a strong desire among contributors to see the next programme **move towards capturing and reporting on more qualitative, outcomes-based indicators** of success. Quantitative targets and measurements are considered inappropriate to capture the totality of the work undertaken by PIs under SICAP, and ill-suited to the nature of development work in particular.

The use of quantitative measurements and targets was seen as problematic not just from the perspective of failing to capture outcomes and the quality of work with individuals and communities, but also because of a widespread concern that using **numeric targets incentivises the wrong kinds of activity** within the programme. There is a desire to see a different performance framework and reporting mechanism that incentivises key activities rather than encouraging a focus on, for example, “easy” cases or “cherry picking”. These may allow for targets to be reached more easily but can mean that those who have complex needs which are less easily captured within the current reporting framework might not receive the support needed.

Contributors expressed concern that the **targets and indicators might be perceived as driving the programme design rather than following it**. Participants felt that in some cases they perceived that the limitations of the IRIS system and reporting mechanisms were determining what information was being prioritised for capture and reporting; that this was influencing what types of targets were being chosen, and consequently driving the activity within the programme.

As mentioned above, it was felt that there was an **unfair aspect in setting targets without local consultation**, that the targets might be inappropriate in nature and scale for the local area, and then having the threat of penalties for PIs who did not meet these. It was felt that it exacerbated the issues identified with the focus on numeric targets in relation to incentivising the “wrong” kind of behaviour, such as pushing people towards employment or self-employment that was not suited to them, or working with the “easy” cohorts of people with lower needs, in order to avoid financial penalties.

It was felt that the constant **pressure both to reach high numeric targets and to record quantitative results hinders the ability to innovate within the programme**. The concern about penalties for failure to reach targets was felt to discourage new approaches or innovation, with the risk of failure too significant to take on.

The **reporting and administration burden associated with the programme is considered to be substantial** by comparison with its scale. The reporting mechanisms and tools, in particular IRIS, are seen as cumbersome, inflexible, and not adequately supported by training.

Participants suggested that the **targets-based model discourages inter-agency solutions** as each programme and/or agency is seeking to achieve the targets set within their frameworks, rather than maximising the joint impact on beneficiaries and communities. There is a desire to see future programmes adopt performance frameworks that encourage, rather than disincentivise, collaboration and co-operation.

2.5 Reduced Focus on Activation

A substantial theme relates to stakeholders’ desire to change the balance between the three Goals of the current programme to **reduce the emphasis on activation**. This was seen by many as inappropriately prioritised in the current SICAP, to the detriment of developmental work with communities and individuals.

Participants were generally keen to see a role for SICAP in **progressing people towards employment**, but not necessarily by moving large numbers of individuals into jobs. Contributors emphasised a preferred role in working with those more distant from the labour market in order to progress them to a point where they could participate in activation programmes delivered by other agencies.

It was also highlighted that there are a number of agencies working in the activation space. There was a perception among participants that SICAP was effectively competing in relation to delivering on the activation targets, and that there were issues with double-counting clients in relation to participation in such programmes.

It was suggested that those “left behind” by the economic recovery were those most in need of intervention. Working with these individuals requires a level of input that was difficult to deliver under the current design of SICAP. Participants suggested that the **labour activation element reflected another time** and therefore was not current and required updating.

Participants were also concerned that the targets were pushing individuals towards self-employment. There was a particular **concern regarding the self-employment targets** for 15 to 24 year olds. The feeling among participants was that for this cohort of beneficiaries the focus should be on other activation and employment measures.

By reducing the focus on Goal 3 activities, participants felt that more focus could be given to community development. **Community development is seen as a key part** of the SICAP programme. There was a view among participants that the targets around Goal 3 have led to a reduced focus on community development. Consultees believe that increased community development can assist in identifying beneficiaries. It is also seen as a way to develop trust with beneficiaries and to introduce the supports available to individuals.

3 Concluding Comments

Crowe Horwath has been pleased to be involved in this extensive consultation process. We believe that the report represents an accurate reflection of the views and opinions we heard throughout the consultations.

It has been evident that there is a strong commitment from all stakeholders to the principles of SICAP and a desire to see the programme strengthen and increase its impact on those who need its support. The willingness and enthusiasm of participants to give their time and input is hugely appreciated.