

Roma

Intergenerational Programme

Primary Theme 1: Engagement Strategies with SICAP Target Groups SICAP Lot: 4-1













Background and Identified Need

The European Commission and the Council of Europe use "Roma" as an umbrella term to refer to a number of different groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom and Lom), without denying the specificities and varieties of lifestyles and situations of these groups - National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). Maynooth University's Roma in Ireland: Access to Fair and Decent Work 2023, captures the barriers to employment for Roma. These include; insecure work, underemployment, exploitation, lack of English, discrimination, hiding Ethnicity, gender discrimination, poor health, insecure accommodation, lack of transport and access to information on services and entitlements. In terms of poverty traps and secondary benefits, the report states that the interaction of social protection payments is also a crucial issue and has a big impact on the lives of Roma families. Roma have difficulties in accessing payments/supports due to barriers such as the Habitual Residence Condition. This results in a lack of safety net for many Roma – they must take whatever work is available, they cannot access pre-employment supports, they cannot access additional supports that improve quality of life for example housing payments, child benefit. Roma were identified as a National Priority in the SICAP Mid-Programme Review and also by Fingal LCDC.



Despite these multiple barriers, Empower has successfully engaged the Roma community in Fingal over a period of several years, with Roma accounting for up to 20% of our SICAP Caseload. So much so, that we have supported other service providers, including Local Development Companies, to engage Roma in Cavan, Donegal, Dublin, Louth, Meath and Monaghan. This successful engagement was previously documented in our 2019 SICAP Case Study entitled *Manouche*. Two SICAP community-development staff with extensive experience of engaging hard-to-reach target groups began to attempt to engage with Roma in Balbriggan. This included initial contact with individual members and community leaders of the Roma community. SICAP staff carried out informal discussions on issues of concern, creating a positive climate to encourage members of the community to avail of services and















supports. SICAP staff worked directly with the Chairperson of Musicantia, a volunteer-led Roma music and culture centre based in Balbriggan. Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the engagement strategy led to the formation of the Manouche, a national Roma representative group; a pilot Roma Advocacy Clinic; Roma Advocacy Worker; Intercultural & Community Development Course; Training Programmes; Buchi Roma Employment Programme and the first Roma-specific Community Employment Programme.

While engagement was strong and growing steadily, it was clear that the majority of those engaged in each of Empower's supports were predominantly men, with the exception of a small number of Roma women. Naturally, this highlighted a significant gap in service provision and supports for Roma women and children. Empower began identifying the needs of Roma women and their children across Fingal. A need for health and wellbeing supports for Roma women and their children emerged, with many stating that they rarely access maternity or women's healthcare services. Capacity building was also highlighted as an emerging need, with many women displaying interests in personal and educational development. In response to this identified need, we worked with leaders in the Roma community to establish our Roma Intergenerational Programme.

"The best help. It has helped me and my family a lot. I couldn't do it all by myself with the poor English I have. The help is excellent. I am so pleased and happy that there is such a service.

Everywhere else I went does not compare to this clinic. The help is brilliant"

"Clinica e forte buna ma ajutat forte mult pe mine si familia mea. Nu puteam sa fac tot ce mi sa facut, singura si cu Engleza care nu ma descur prea bine. Ajutarul esta excellent, sunt forte recunascatoare si ma bucur ca egzist un servici asa de bun. Unde am mers nici o clinica nu offera ajutorul cum il offera clinica asta. Ajutorul este minunat"















Description of Action, Role of SICAP

In 2021, Empower launched our **Roma Intergenerational Programme.** This was timely, as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly harsh on this already vulnerable group. Overcrowding, food poverty, digital poverty, and fear of vaccination were particularly challenging for Roma. SICAP has been vital to the success of the programme. The flexibility of SICAP to allow us to pilot initiatives, to resource both staff and programme costs, and to leverage additional funding has been essential. In total approximately €266,000 has been incurred, with €139,000 leveraged from the DCEDIY, HSE, TUSLA and private funding, which was only possible due to the efforts of SICAP staff.

2023 Roma Expenditure						
Description	€					
	SICAP	DCEDIY	Private	TUSLA	HSE	Total
Salary Cost	116,458	28,150	37,365	0	50,357	232,330
Programme Costs	10,000	2,500	0	8,000	13,000	33,500
Total	126,458	30,650	37,365	8,000	63,357	265,830

The Roma Intergenerational Programme now consists of eight team members, some directly through SICAP and others by other funding streams. These include a Child and Family Services Manager (72% SICAP); Child and Family Project Worker; Engagement Worker; Food Bank Coordinator (35% SICAP); Health and Equality Coordinator (100% SICAP); Case Worker (30% SICAP) Peer Worker and a Roma Women's Engagement Worker. Four of these key workers are Roma and therefore have first-hand lived experience of the challenges facing Roma in Fingal. In addition, SICAP also contributes to the project through the fundraising, governance, oversight and financial reporting of the SICAP-funded Social Inclusion Manager, Compliance Officer and Administrator.

The Roma Intergenerational Programme seeks to identify the health needs of Roma women and children and reduce the barriers to accessing appropriate healthcare and social services. Specifically, it aims to:

- 1. Improve health and wellbeing outcomes for Roma women, children and families in Fingal.
- 2. Provide a safe and secure environment for women and children to fully engage with services and receive information and advice, empowering them to be proactive in their own lives.
- 3. Develop and build capacity for a peer-led intergenerational family support network.
- 4. Conduct qualitative and quantitative action-based research, to identify the needs of the Roma women and children and establishing an appropriate response pathway.
- 5. Provide informal and formal child development, welfare and family support interventions.
- 6. Focus on health promotion initiatives, specifically in relation to child health (vaccinations), maternity/women's health care services and screening.
- 7. Act as a bridge between Roma families and healthcare service providers, through mediation and advocacy supports, supporting positive working relationships and ensure better outcomes.
- 8. Collaborate with other service providers in order to provide a planned, holistic response to emerging needs.















In early 2022, HSE Social Inclusion Services, invited Empower's Roma Intergenerational Programme to be the anchor service in the newly established *Dublin North Inclusion Health Hub*, located in central Balbriggan. This was a significant development for the programme and has largely contributed to the expansion of the service to date. The HSE Inclusion Health Hub consists of a range of other social inclusion and healthcare services, which supports an interagency response for the community and opportunities for signposting and collaboration. Since first established in 2021, the Roma Intergenerational Programme has directly supported over 50 families including 77 adults and 114 children. In addition to this, the programme provides weekly food poverty support to 53 Roma families, reaching a significant number of individuals and children.

At a Glance

The following is a list of actions, regular initiatives and services offered:

- Peer Health Research (Qualitative)
- Weekly GP Clinics
- Weekly Rights-based Advocacy Clinics
- Drop-In Advocacy Supports
- Weekly Food Bank
- Family Support
- Mediation
- Translation Services
- Women's Development Group
- Vulnerable Women's Health/Housing Initiative
- English Language Classes
- Child Health Initiatives
- Baby Massage/Parenting Support
- Healthy Food Made Easy Courses



Building capacity within the team, and community at large, was key in order to realise the aims and objectives of the programme. Staff participated in a range of education and training supports, upskilling them and enabling them to fulfil their individual roles within the team. This provided a level of expertise on the team and ensured the development of a quality service for Roma people. These pivoted significantly around SICAP supports that took place over several years, which are highlighted below under each Goal.













Goal 1 Supports

Running parallel to the above activities, a **Roma Women's Development Group** was established in 2020. This is facilitated by the Roma women on the team and includes eight other Roma women. Throughout 2023, Empower continued to support the Roma Women's Development Group through an employment-related training course and personal development activities, such as, driver theory test training and Health Food Made Easy Facilitator Training. In 2022, members of the group took part in a HFME course, which involved the women recreating popular traditional Roma recipes. Seven women subsequently went on to train as HFME facilitators. As a result, the women are currently developing and designing a traditional Roma cookbook which will be available in 2024. This group also provides peer support for the women, building capacity within the community and developing dedicated support networks for Roma women and their children.

In early 2021, Empower recruited a Roma Integration Manager, now, the Child and Family Services Manager. This supported the growth and scope of Roma Intergenerational Programme, with the programme growing steadily since then. The aims and objectives are being met through a variety of needs-led interventions, that often involve collaborations with other community and statutory organisations including;

- HSE Social Inclusion
- Public Health Nursing
- HSE Child Health
- Fingal Children and Young People Services Committee
- Fingal County Council
- Tusla Educational Support Services/Child Protection Social Work/Prevention Partnership and Family Support
- Homeless Services

Goal 2 supports

In 2018, prior to becoming employed with Empower, each Roma staff member was registered under Goal 2 of SICAP. They subsequently went onto attend courses funded by SICAP such as: QQI Level 6 Leadership in Intercultural Community (2018), Manual Handling (2019) Online Computers (2020), Digital Citizen and Stress Control Course (2021). They all also received laptops under our Connect & Include initiative that was also the focus of a separate qualitative case study. Since participating in various education and training courses, each have developed significantly in terms of their knowledge and skill base, providing invaluable support to members of their community, through the work of the Programme. For example, our Women's Engagement Worker has gone on to train in Baby Massage, which supports the provision of our parenting and infant mental health support group. This additional training has enabled each worker to fulfil their individual roles within the team and develop their own professional practice. This provides a level of expertise within the team and ensures the development of a quality service for Roma people.

"very good...everyone helps...I'm happy, my family is happy"

"foarte bine...toată lumea ajută...Sunt fericit, familia mea este fericită"

¹ In response to digital poverty which came to the fore during COVID-19 restrictions, Empower established Connect & Include which supported already disadvantaged SICAP target groups in four key areas – Hardware, Software, Connectivity and Capacity.















Roma Health Research Project

There is a dearth of statistical baseline data on Roma in Ireland, particularly the health needs of Roma. It was fundamental that we could evidence this need, with the research key findings informing how the programme would continue to develop. It was also a key component of our engagement strategy that the research was target-group led. In 2020, our Diversity and Inclusion Officer, supported by the Roma Integration Manager and other SICAP colleagues, completed and submitted a funding application, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's (IHREC) Access to Rights and Access to Justice grant scheme.

This enabled the Roma Intergenerational Programme to conduct a peer-led research project aimed at identifying the health needs of Roma women and children and the barriers to accessing appropriate healthcare services in the Fingal area. As a peer-led initiative, this provided opportunities for development within the community as four Roma women were able to develop their skills set through conducting the research and being involved in the whole process, from recruitment to interviewing to writing reports.

This research is set to launch in late 2023. Some of the barriers identified included language and literacy skills, lack of access to information and lack of access to culturally appropriate healthcare information and support. The key findings highlighting the need for Roma specific healthcare, specifically, GP access and information in relation to women's health and child health.

Rights-based Advocacy Clinics

The first aspect of the Roma Intergenerational Programme delivered in 2021 was our Rights-based Advocacy Clinics. Clinics are now taking place twice weekly and provide supports in relation a range of welfare, housing, health, family support, education and employment related issues. These clinics are facilitated by the whole staff team and often require signposting and support to actively engage with other relevant government agencies or support services. To date this year, 31 Roma families have presented to the clinics for a range of advocacy supports. These families often include large numbers of adult children or relatives sharing accommodation and children under eighteen years.



The presenting needs this year have included 21 for welfare application issues, 10 for housing/homelessness support and 1 for immigration application support. Other needs that people presented with include educational supports, language and literacy, medical card applications, and supports with form filling for a wide range of activities. Many individuals require further support after















the initial need is met. These cases are allocated to case workers and on-going support is provided with a focus on building capacity so that individuals can advocate for themselves in the future.

Young People's Intercultural Dialogue Event

Over the course of 2021 and 2022, a joint initiative between Fingal Children and Young People Services Committee and a range of other service providers, including Empower, was conducted. This involved a number young people from different ethnic communities, coming together to raise their voices and create awareness in relation to the racism and discrimination experienced by them living in Ireland. Preparation meeting and the event itself all took place online, due to COVID-19 restrictions. Two Roma young people from the Roma Intergenerational Programme were among the participants involved.

The young people involved described their personal experiences through the medium of storytelling, music, poetry or spoken word, to a panel of relevant voluntary and statutory professionals. They also had the opportunity to put questions to the panel and requested that each professional follow up with ideas or feedback to their respective organisations/teams. A follow up event was held six months later whereby the panel of professionals addressed the issues raised by the young people and offered potential solutions in combatting discrimination and racism in communities around Fingal and throughout Ireland.



Child Health Initiative

2022 saw the beginning of a Child Health Initiative, which will be rolled out across Balbriggan and other parts of Dublin North over the course of 2023/2024. This initiative is in collaboration with HSE Child Health Officers and Public Health Nurses and is aimed at promoting engagement of Roma women and their children in primary healthcare services in Balbriggan.

Existing child health resources have been translated into Romanian and Romani and new resources, such as child health/parenting information videos, are also being developed. This will tackle the language barrier for some, as highlighted in the key findings of the research. Infant mental health and parenting supports are also provided in a group work setting, reaching higher numbers and responding to emerging needs.















Food Poverty Initiative

The food bank began operating weekly from the HSE Inclusion Health Hub, in December 2022. There are currently 179 families registered with the food bank. This includes over 400 children. The Foodbank Coordinator distributes parcels containing food and hygiene supports to families. 53 of these families are Roma. So far, guaranteed annual funding of €17,000 has been secured from HSE Social Inclusion. Empower has also allocated further funding from SICAP. The Foodbank is a Goal 1 Collaboration/Network chaired by Empower, involving several different organisations², due to significant increase in food poverty among SICAP target groups.³ SICAP staff operate the food bank from the HSE Inclusion Health Hub.



The weekly food bank not only provides individuals and families with food and hygiene items, but also the opportunity to engage with services and access information in relation to supports and progression opportunities, as well as referral pathways to more appropriate services. Pertinent information leaflets on supports and services are also distributed in the food parcels.

The provision of food enables families to utilise income in other ways, avoiding them having to make difficult decisions and prioritising basic needs, a common challenge for families during the current cost-of-living crisis. Parents often have to make a choice between feeding themselves or their children.

Our Healthy Food Made Easy Programme provides an additional layer to the work of the Foodbank with tailored courses aimed at developing capacity for families attending the food bank and providing additional food items to create nutritious, healthy meals at home.

³ Addressing food poverty in children is a commitment in the Programme for Government. The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025, which is the national strategy for poverty reduction and improved social inclusion, includes a specific commitment to 'develop a comprehensive programme of work to further explore the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions'.













² Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support, Aster Family Resource Centre, Empower, Fingal Leadership Partnership, Tusla Child and Family Agency and The Socratics



Women's Housing/Health Initiative

As language is often identified as one of the most common barriers for Roma women and the increase in numbers of women attending the clinic seeking housing supports, the Women's Housing/Health Initiative would meet a number of emerging needs. Supported by the HSE, the initiative involves English language classes running over ten weeks, with three parallel information sessions on housing, homelessness and wellbeing. It is coordinated by the Roma Peer Worker and the Health Equality Coordinator of the Roma Intergenerational Programme. Earlier in the year, a ten-week course was delivered, supporting five Roma women, with a second course running from September to December 2023. This course will support a further seven women and includes the same format.

GP/Healthcare Access

Following sustained advocating, awareness raising, evidence of need and collaboration between Empower's SICAP programme and the HSE, a new Roma GP service began in August 2023. It is naturally located in the Balbriggan HSE Inclusion Health Hub. This is a significant development for the programme.

This GP service is targeted specifically at Roma non-medical card holders. Referrals come mainly from the Roma Intergenerational Programme, however, referrals are also accepted from other services within the hub, and other Empower programmes. The GP clinic operates every Thursday with a morning and afternoon session. A Public Health Nurse is also available to meet the child health needs of Roma families. The Roma Intergenerational Programme is currently collaborating with HSE nursing staff on the development of a handbook for Roma mothers and their children. This will include information in relation to women's health issues, parenting and child health.



As access to GP healthcare was identified as one of, if not the most, pressing needs within the Roma community, this service is responding directly to that need, reducing some of the inequalities experienced by Roma, specifically Roma women. The Roma Intergenerational Programme also provides translators, if required, as well cultural supports for services users attending the GP. As well as gaining access to medical care, Roma individuals and families can also access information and will be signposted to other relevant services, where appropriate.















Lessons Learned

Horizontal Principles

There are strong links between SICAP's Horizontal Principles and the work of the Roma Intergenerational Programme. The Rights-based clinics are governed by a human rights and equality framework, focusing specifically on women within the Roma community and supporting their access to relevant health and social care services and opportunities to engage in life outside their home. There are also natural links to community development and collaboration as service provision requires stakeholder's engagement at all levels. This ensure that appropriate supports are available and accessible to the most vulnerable within the Roma community.

Clear links can also be made to a number of the UN Global Goals for sustainable development. Some of these include the following;

- No Poverty
- o Zero Hunger
- o Good Health & Well-being
- Quality Education
- Gender Equality
- Reduced Inequalities

Developing collaborative approaches with stakeholders such as the HSE and FCYPSC has been essential for ensuring positive outcomes and quality service provision for the Roma Intergenerational Programme and its service users. This engagement has improved how mainstream policies and programmes are delivered so that they impact more positively on socially excluded Roma.



Promoting an equality framework with a particular focus on gender equality and anti-discriminatory practices has been critical to the entire engagement process of the programme. The recruitment of members of the Roma community as frontline workers, proved pivotal in encouraging other people from this community to attend the service and seek a variety of supports.

"Helpful, if I didn't know this service no one would help me"
"Foarte ojutorabil, dacă nu cunostean acest serviciu, nimeni nu ma ajuta"















Core community development principles are central to the work of the Roma Intergenerational Programme in engaging with Roma. Applying community development approaches, participation of disadvantaged and marginalised communities in the wider local development context has been hugely important to the success of the programme and the integration of the Roma community itself.

As part of a pre-engagement strategy, consultation with community members played a vital role in the development of the Roma Intergenerational Programme. This approach created opportunities to show transparency and build a strong, meaningful relationships with the Roma community, targeting issues of trust, fear and awareness, helping to reduce feelings of mistrust and suspicion. Understanding the level of discrimination and racism experienced by Roma in Ireland and their countries of origin is the baseline of our work with this community.

Fostering the independence of the Roma Women's Development Group has had a hugely positive effect on the confidence of this target group and its individual members. It has also resulted in a significant change in how women are perceived within the community. True leaders have emerged as a result of some of the activities of this group particularly, impacting the wider community. In April of this year, the women organised a celebration event to mark International Roma Day. Over forty people from the Roma community attended – women, children and men. Members of the women's group spoke about Roma culture, their experiences living in Ireland and the work of the Roma Intergenerational Programme. Traditional Roma music was played, people sang and traditional Roma food was enjoyed by all.

Without building the capacity of leaders within the Roma community, many of the reported outcomes of the Roma Intergenerational Programme would not have occurred. The vast majority of Roma who have registered for SICAP did so after being referred by a local community group or hearing about Empower from a family member/friend.

Challenges

COVID-19 created a huge challenge in relation to the initial engagement strategy for the programme. As most of the Roma community did not take up vaccinations, it was difficult to run certain activities. Due to a high prevalence of long-term chronic conditions, Roma were more vulnerable to COVID-19, which meant they were also more vulnerable to serious health issues and even premature death. Sadly, there were a large number of deaths within the Roma community in Balbriggan during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employment and opportunities for casual work, which is often the type of work Roma engage in, were made significantly harder during this time also. Unemployment and low income have long been a problem for Roma people. Many lost their daily sources of income and faced limited access to social and welfare services as these were harder to access due to lockdowns and quarantine restrictions.

During the lockdowns, families and people received food parcels, delivered jointly by staff of Manouche and Empower through SICAP. Each parcel contained a HSE COVID-19 leaflet translated into Romani. Some families also received resource packs containing sanitary materials, PPE and activity packs for children that included games, colouring books and pencils. In the absence of these essential supports, the health and wellbeing of the Roma Community would have been even more disproportionately affected.

"Without building the capacity of leaders within the Roma Community such a rapid response would not have been possible" Giusepe Pruteanu, CE Supervisor in Musicantia.















Other challenges facing the Roma Intergenerational Programme include gender barriers, lack of appropriate childcare options and engagement. While engagement has significantly improved, often the harder to reach individuals attend the programme during times of crisis and do not always engage in other supports or capacity building activities. Empower are currently looking at not-for-profit early-years childcare provision as a barrier and potential ways that we can support Roma women to engage in education, training and personal development activities, without the additional barrier of childcare.

As the Roma Intergenerational Programme is needs-led, we continue to develop based on the needs of the community at any given time. We continue to collaborate with other service providers to ensure accessibility for Roma women, children and families. We support the development of strong links for Roma with appropriate health or social care services and bridge some of the existing gaps in service provision, by combatting some of the long-standing barriers for the Roma community.















Outputs and Outcomes

Goal 1

The needs of the Roma community and the Roma LCG have been identified, and are now represented and integrated through local planning and service delivery. G1–1:1

The Roma Women's Development Group (LCG) has a greater capacity to address the social inclusion needs of the communities they serve or represent. G1-2:2

The Roma Women's Development Group is now represented and actively participate in decision-making structures. G1-3:1

The collaboration and co-operation between relevant stakeholders in addressing social exclusion and inequality in relation to the Roma community has increased substantially. G1-4:2

Goal 2

The personal skills, wellbeing and capabilities of those who have approached the Rights-based Advocacy Clinics. Many Roma have secured housing or been placed on a council housing list. G2 - 1:1

The personal skills, wellbeing and capabilities of 53 Roma families have also been improved through the Foodbank. Addressing food poverty in children is a commitment in the Programme for Government. The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025, which is the national strategy for poverty reduction and improved social inclusion, includes a specific commitment to 'develop a comprehensive programme of work to further explore the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions'.

The translation of HSE Child Health Information Leaflets though the Child Health Initiatives has helped overcome language barriers for Roma many who are originally from Romania and for whom English is their third working language.

Members of the Roma community who approached the Rights-based Advocacy Clinics have received information about opportunities for lifelong learning. G2 - 2:1

Members of the Roma community and frontline staff of the programme have participated in lifelong learning courses that were delivered through Empower- G2 - 2:2

Members of the Roma community have achieved higher levels of qualifications as a result of participating in lifelong learning courses. G2-2:3

77 adults and 114 children have benefitted through the services of the Roma Intergenerational Programme. G2-3:2.1

Members of the Roma community are better prepared to enter the labour market as a result of the advice they have received through the Drop-In Clinics. G2-4:1

Intercultural Dialogue has resulted in the young people becoming involved in a potential peer research initiative with FUSE, which is an anti-bullying programme and a follow up networking event with the Fingal Chamber regarding employment opportunities. G2-4:3















Members of the Roma community have moved into more sustainable and better quality employment since being recruited by the Roma Intergenerational Programme as frontline workers G2-5:1

Conclusion

The success of the Roma Intergenerational Programme is linked largely to collaborations with key agencies such as the Northside Home Care, who initially funded the pilot project, and the HSE, who have supported many of the initiatives to date. Another reason the programme has continued to expand and engage in such high numbers, is a direct result of having Roma employees who are willing to train and upskill. This has been a key part of our engagement strategy and expansion of services.

Empower is currently looking at emerging needs of Roma in Mulhuddart, Dublin 15. With a high Roma population, the need for a similar service has been highlighted in the areas of Mulhuddart and Tyrrelstown. In response to this, we have begun providing advocacy supports on a one-to-one basis in this area. Weekly clinics are set to begin before the end of this year and further talks with the HSE in relation to a GP Clinic for this area are also underway. However, in order to develop a 'needs-led' quality service similar to Balbriggan, additional staff and subsequent training are required.



As outlined earlier in this report, building capacity within the Roma community is vital for engagement, true integration and service development. The Roma Intergenerational Programme model is one that could be rolled out at local level on a national basis, responding to the needs of Roma across Ireland, however, funding is imperative.

"Extraordinary, this service helped me everywhere I need it. Me and my family with everything I need, medical card, food, house, social welfare. Thank you very much"

"Extraordinar, acest serviciu ma ajutat pestetot unde au avat nevoie pe mine si familia cu tot ce au avut nevoie cu Cart Medicala, Mancare, casa, social. Multumesc foarte mult"











