



Traveller Outreach Strategy
Primary Theme 1: Engagement Strategies with
SICAP Target Groups

SICAP Lot: 4-1



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach
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Clár Gníomhachtúcháin Pobail
agus Cuimsiú Sóisialta.



an rialtas ag tacú le pobail

Tá an Clár um Chuimsiú Sóisialta agus Gníomhachtú Pobail (SICAP) cómhainithe ag Rialtas na hÉireann, tríd an Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail, agus ag an Aontas Eorpach trí Chiste Sóisialta na hEorpa Plus faoin gClár Fostaíochta, Cuimsiú, Scileanna agus Oiliúna (EIST) 2021 - 2027.



Background

The Traveller Community is one of the most disadvantaged groups in Ireland. Based on Empower’s recommendation, Fingal LCDC selected the Traveller Community as one of three Local Priority Target Groups (LPTG) for the duration of SICAP 3. This case study will showcase our engagement strategy with the Traveller Community in line with Case Study Theme 1 Target Group Focus and Core Area of Work 3 – Collaborative Responses to Identified Needs. The Traveller Community is defined as “the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland” (Equal Status Act 2000, Section 2 (1)).

The number of Travellers living in Fingal was 1,545 according to Census 2022. This represents 0.5% of the Fingal population. This is a 17.6% increase on the previous Census 2016. Census data shows that Travellers have a much younger age profile, higher birth rates, and “tend to live 8-years shorter than people do generally in Ireland” (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020 Report). 40.8% of the Traveller population in Fingal are aged under 15 years old, compared to 22.4% of the overall county population.ⁱ Just 3.8% of Travellers in Fingal are aged 65+, compared to 11% of the total population.

Although, the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy claims that “progress has been made to improve participation rates in second and third level education” (Gov,

2024, p.12), Travellers continue to experience poorer educational outcomes than the wider population. In Fingal, 73.5% of Travellers aged 15 and over whose education has ceased are considered as *early-school leavers*. Research conducted by the ESRI argues that “Traveller children and teenagers experience discrimination within the school environment, which may precipitate early-school leaving” (ibid, 2024).

Travellers face worse labour-market outcomes, with 62.8% being captured as unemployed in Fingal, compared to 7.8% for Fingal’s overall population. Census 2022 reveals that there are more Travellers in Fingal categorised as *long-term unemployed* compared to Travellers who are working.ⁱⁱ Recent research has established that “Travellers were ten times as likely to experience discrimination seeking work than White Irish respondents, even accounting for background characteristics” (ESRI, 2024, p.10) which is a significant contributory factor towards Travellers being excluded from the labour market.

Given the far higher rates of unemployment experienced by Travellers, it is inevitable that they experience higher levels of poverty and social exclusion. The Traveller Community experience higher financial exclusion with 40% of households having trouble making ends meet, such as heating their accommodation to having access to healthy food. The European Union Fundamental Rights Agency 2019 study found that 24% of Travellers faced severe housing deprivation, which was 30 times more than for people generally in Ireland (0.8%).



Traveller Women attending voter education workshop

The SICAP Horizontal Themes of Equality, Community Development and Collaboration are central to Empower's values, and are reflected in our strategic reviews, programme planning and day-to-day delivery. Since our foundation, community development principles of consultation, participation, empowerment, social justice and equality have been evident in engaging with the Traveller Community through facilitating focus groups to identify their needs prior to SICAP tendering processes and through a variety of outreach practices. Empower has supported several Traveller organisations at each stage of the community development matrix in Fingal. Community Development is a developmental activity composed of both task and process. The task is the achievement of social change linked to equality and social justice, and the process is the application of the principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way.ⁱⁱⁱ

North Fingal Outreach

Balbriggan Travellers Project, which operates from Matt Lane, Balbriggan, forms part of our SICAP Goal 1 community organisation caseload.^{iv} For 7 years, Traveller women have been facilitated by Empower team members to come together as a support group to progress and advance common issues affecting them through *community animation* activities. We initially supported this group of women to access personal development supports, attend voter registration workshops and receive training supports under Goal

2. Four of these Traveller women also attended a [QQI Level 6 Intercultural Community Leadership Course](#) with TU Dublin that was organised by Empower and part-funded by SICAP, which was the focus of a previous video case study.^v This has had a lasting impact in relation to our interaction with the Traveller Community.^{vi}

One of these Traveller women was inspired by our Intercultural Community Leadership Course and went on to do a BSS in Community and Youth Work in NUI Maynooth. She has subsequently secured employment as the Manager of Balbriggan Travellers Project and represents the Traveller Community on a range of local, regional and national structures (see *Maggie's Story* vignette page 9).

In 2020, during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Balbriggan Travellers Project and Empower team members collaborated to respond to the challenges resulting from the 'National Stay at Home Order'.^{vii} They jointly organised and helped provide *COVID-19 resource packs* to 51 Traveller families living on sites in Balbriggan, Skerries and Swords. Many of these families continue to get weekly foodbank supports.

At the time, Travellers were unable to source cleaning products in local shops and due to the close living quarters and overcrowding on sites, there was a genuine fear of catching the virus, so Empower organised for the purchase of cleaning products from wholesalers and made up resource packs. These packs were delivered in collaboration with the Development Worker of the Balbriggan Travellers Project.^{viii} Easter eggs, colouring books, pencils, crayons and HSE approved information leaflets were also contained within the resource packs delivered to people living on the various sites across Fingal. As one person observed:

“how were you to isolate in trailers? Only one or two bedrooms and one toilet – you couldn't not touch anything, Travellers had that harder, usually a lot of people in a house”.



COVID-19 resource pack deliveries

In more recent years, Empower has hosted non-caseload events including a *Voter Registration Day* attended by 20 members of the Balbriggan Travellers Project ahead of the referendums on Family and Care. Those newly registered Travellers were supported to cast a vote in local and European elections while ensuring impartiality and thereby exercise their democratic mandate.^{ix} In conjunction with the Balbriggan Travellers Project, we also held a joint event at Matt Lane as part of [Fingal Social Inclusion Week](#) in November 2024, to tackle *health inequalities* experienced by Traveller women. Our Healthy Food Made Easy Coordinator delivered a sample session and we held a workshop focusing on the menopause.^x Period dignity packs were made available to those who attended, and 33 of the women who attend availed of a free health check and blood pressure check.^{xi}



Fingal Inclusion Week 2024
Joint initiative by Balbriggan Travellers Project & Empower

- Healthy-Food Made Easy demo
- Menopause info session
- Period Dignity packs
- Free Blood pressure and health check

Teas/Coffees/pastries on arrival and lunch at 12pm
12th November from 9.45am until 12.30pm
Balbriggan Travellers Project
Matt Lane Balbriggan K32P660
Contact Maggie on 083-8770637 BTP
or Jean on 0872879405 Empower



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 Union through the European Social Fund Plus under the Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) Programme 2021-2027.

In 2025, to celebrate *International Women’s Day*, Empower collaborated with Balbriggan Travellers Project, ASTER Family Resource Centre and the Roma Intergenerational Programme to host an event in the Bracken Court Hotel. A panel was established and the theme for the event was Accelerating Action - A Glimpse Into Women's Journey. 80 women attended who were representative of different SICAP target groups including Travellers. Other activities included Poetry and Cafe Style Networking.

In January 2025, a Steering Group was established in conjunction with the Balbriggan Travellers Project to accommodate a group of eight men interested in exploring training options. An initial information session was held at Matt Lane, followed by a training needs analysis. Seven courses of interest were identified: Door Security Skills & Security Guarding Skills, Driver Theory, Fire Safety, Forklift Training, Manual Handling, SafePass, and Working at Height (MEWP).

Throughout 2025, our collaboration with the Balbriggan Travellers Project also resulted in the delivery of Copper Art workshops, driver theory classes, SafePass and Manual Handling courses, as well as supporting individual Travellers to acquire Forklift Licenses. This included Reach, Counter Balance and Powered Pallet Truck. This has improved their

employability and labour-market prospects. These courses were delivered on the Matt Lane Travellers site and therefore removed travel as a barrier to participation.^{xii} The lack of affordable and accessible childcare remains a huge barrier for Traveller women who want to participate in training and education.



Social Inclusion Week, Matt Lane

Empower has developed a 12-week Skills for Life course in collaboration with Balbriggan Traveller Project and the Roma Women's Group. 21 women (8 Travellers) are participating and learning new skills to promote sustainability and ensure climate justice, under the SDGs. These skills include upcycling clothes and furniture as well as repurposing everyday household items that previously would have been binned. The course also promotes integration with Traveller, Roma and settled women all learning together.

We have also collaborated with DDLETB and TU Dublin to organise QQI Level 4 Community Development and QQI Level 6 Intercultural Community Leadership courses, respectively. Both these courses have Traveller participation and in addition to building the individual participants skills and capacity, it also improves integration and networking opportunities for multiple SICAP target groups, including Travellers.



Maggie McDonagh, Balbriggan Travellers Project addresses the International Women's Day event

Maggie's Story

As a Traveller woman, my journey through education and community work has been one of real growth, resilience, and empowerment. When I started the QQI Level 6 in Intercultural Community Leadership back in 2019, I honestly had no idea how much it would change both my life and how I saw myself.

That course gave me so much more than education. It gave me confidence in my own abilities and skills — something I had been made to believe I lacked by educators throughout my youth. I felt valued and capable, and I began to see my background and lived experience as strengths rather than barriers.

The learning environment was warm and supportive, and I built strong, lasting friendships with my classmates. The bonds we formed back then have stood the test of time, we still keep in touch and continue to support each other in our work and in life. We went through that journey side-by-side, learning, growing, and finding our voices together. Those friendships still mean a lot to me today.

Jean from Empower, has been such an incredible support to me over the years. From my early days as a student to now working in partnership with Empower, Jean has always been there with encouragement and guidance. She's been someone who truly believed in me, even when I doubted myself, and her support has played a big part in my development and in helping me grow into the leader I am today. Working alongside Empower has given me great opportunities to collaborate, share ideas, and strengthen the impact of our work in the community.

After finishing the QQI Level 6 course, I went on to Maynooth University, where I completed an Honours Degree in Community and Youth Work, graduating in 2023. That was such a proud moment not only for me but for my family and my community. The degree deepened my understanding of social justice, youth participation, and equality, and it helped me connect my own experiences as a Traveller woman with wider issues of inequality and advocacy.

Since graduating, I've been proud to take on the role of Manager of the Balbriggan Travellers Project. This job means so much to me because it allows me to work directly with my own community to support their empowerment, and advocate for Traveller families and young people. Every day, I'm reminded of the importance of representation and the strength of community-led development.

Looking back, I can see that every step from the QQI Level 6 course to university and now to my current role has been part of a journey of empowerment. The people I met along the way, especially my peers and the team at Empower, have played such an important part in that journey. Education gave me the confidence to believe in myself, and I hope that my story shows other Traveller women that they too have the ability and strength to reach their goals and become leaders within our community

Graltí

Maggie McDonagh

Dublin 15 Outreach

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025, includes a specific commitment to develop a comprehensive programme of work to further explore the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions. Because food poverty^{xiii} has escalated among SICAP target groups, Empower’s Traveller Engagement Worker began to provide weekly food parcel and fuel voucher deliveries to families across different sites in Dublin 15 and individual houses during COVID-19 restrictions.^{xiv} This outreach activity has continued throughout SICAP 3 and upwards of 280 members of the Traveller Community now receive welfare and wellbeing supports. Our Traveller Engagement Worker represents Empower on a number of Traveller-specific support services including Traveller MABS, SVdeP Traveller Conference, the HSE-led Traveller Critical Response Committee, Blanchardstown Traveller Development Project, and the Tolka River CE Project.^{xv}

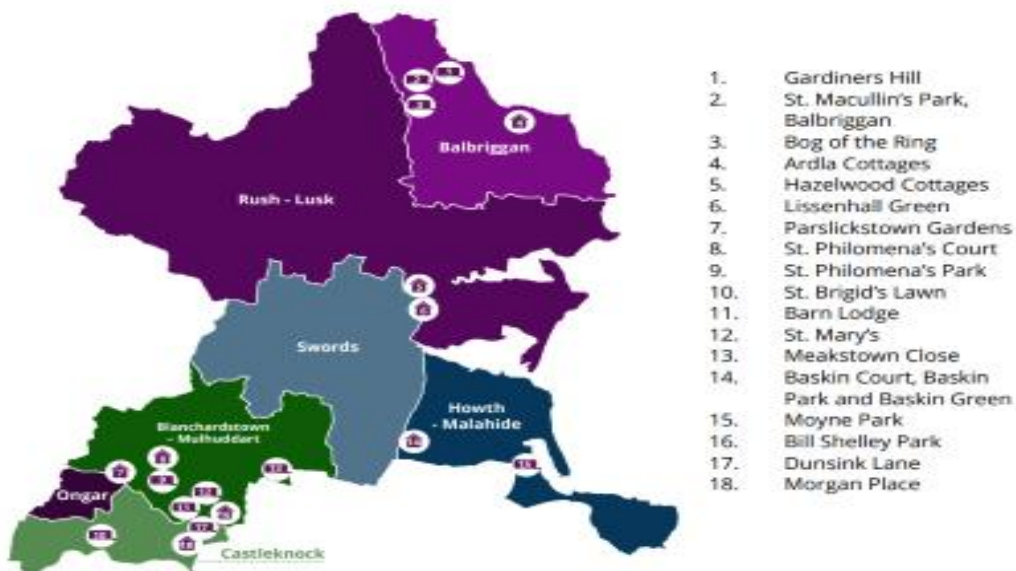
“No, it really does help. The food shopping is very handy for people like me who is stuck and for the likes of these St Vincent De Paul vouchers clothes wise ..and with the water turned off at the machines and stuff that can’t go on, its expensive getting down to the wash houses and these are of great help - thanks for all your help” (Sarah, Traveller woman)



Traveller women integrating with other SICAP groups for International Women’s Day event

The nature of this on the ground outreach strategy has broadened in magnitude since our Traveller Engagement Worker gained the trust of the Traveller Community and through representing Empower on these various structures. More recently she has supported her

female Traveller caseload by referring them into health, family support, homeless services, MABS, lifelong learning opportunities and charities to provide for their basic needs as reflected on IRIS.



Source: Fingal County Council: Traveller Accommodation Programme, 2025-2029

Unfortunately, due to Travellers suffering from poor mental health outcomes^{xvi} many of the immediate or extended family members have taken their own lives. Studies show that Travellers are six times more likely to complete suicide. This can result in the bereaved partner having to be supported with an immediate intervention and health care appointments made on their behalf. This activity is in keeping with 2022-2027 National Traveller Health Action Plan which attempts to address persistent inequalities in Travellers health and wellbeing.

Because many of the Goal 2 caseload are living in *jobless households*, some have had to be referred to MABS due to debts being incurred around certain times of the year associated with religious festive events such as the First Holy Communion and Christmas. Some Traveller women we support are in effect lone parents. However, there appears to be a stigma and reluctance for many of these women to identify as Head of One Parent Families. This stigma is identified in Pavee Points *Good Practice Guidelines* report. More recently, our Traveller Engagement Worker has also attempted to further breakdown

social isolation among Traveller women by forming a sewing group with the objective of possibly developing a social enterprise under Goal 1. We have also formed a Traveller-specific Parent and Toddler Group in Mulhuddart. This allows Traveller women who are limited to engagement in education and training due to lack of affordable childcare to participate in a social activity by bringing their children with them.



Traveller Sewing Group Blanchardstown

Domestic Violence is a significant issue for Traveller women. *The Irish Traveller and Roma Women - Joint Alternative Report*, August 2022 highlights the intersection of gender-based violence with their social exclusion in general. We have also linked Traveller women into Women's Aid and local shelters to help meet their emergency housing needs due to domestic violence.

Empower has provided information and advocacy support for Travellers experiencing accommodation issues. Multiple reports identify that Travellers are living in "desperate conditions" on halting sites including in some cases no sewerage facilities and no piped water source. Travellers face multiple barriers to accessing private housing, including discrimination, lack of cultural appropriateness and are 22% more likely to become homeless (*Final Report of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community 2021*). In response to this, Empower have referred several families to Fingal County Council's Housing Department to ensure they are placed on the social housing

list in the hope of securing long-term housing and transition out of other types of temporary or overcrowded accommodation. Whilst Fingal County Council's *Equality Review of Travellers 2021* states a number of Travellers live in standard accommodation and are on the waitlist for same, we note the findings of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's ***Fingal-CC-Equality-Review***. The IHREC review notes that Fingal Travellers who express a desire for 'standard accommodation' also 'desire to retain their ethnicity'. Anecdotally, the main motivation for Travellers we support to move to standard accommodation is because of the poor conditions in official halting sites.

Fingal-wide Initiatives

Empower's Senior Community Development Worker is a member of the Boards of both Balbriggan Traveller Project and Blanchardstown Traveller Development Project. This not only builds relationships and trust with both organisations, but ensures that there is cohesion between our respective strategic plans and dovetailing of our work.

Empower has been central to establishing Fingal-wide structures under Goal 1. In recent years, we set up the *Fingal Anti-Racism Network*, which consists of volunteers, community groups and other stakeholders committed to Anti-Racism and supporting those affected by racism. It aims to build safe and inclusive communities, educate and create awareness about racism and how to respond, and to support witnesses and victims, break isolation and get support from other members of the community network. The Local Community Groups who make up its membership form part of our Goal 1 caseload including the *Balbriggan Travellers Project* and *Blanchardstown Traveller Development Project*^{xvii} along with several other organisations^{xviii} It is Chaired by Empower and helped inform the new National Action Plan Against Racism that was launched by the Government.^{xix}

Recent research identified that "Irish Travellers were more likely to experience discrimination in access to services such as social welfare and local council services" (ESRI, 2024, p.10). With this in mind, Empower and TU Dublin launched a research report in May 2025 entitled *Developing Anti-Racist Practice in Community and Higher Education* and an [Organisational Anti-racism Roadmap](#), a support resource for organisations looking

to improve their anti-racist practice. Members of the Traveller Community actively participated in our Organisational Anti-Racism Roadmap. As a member of INAR, Empower through Chairing the Fingal Anti-Racism Network is helping capture data on racist incidents locally in Fingal. We delivered training on how the iReport System works and how to use it in practice. See link for more details: <https://www.ireport.ie/>

Empower is a member of TU Dublin's PATH 3 and PATH 5 Steering Committees. These committees work to have a coordinated response to the engagement of Travellers in accessing 3rd level education at TU Dublin. This included a Traveller and Roma-specific Education Fair in Grangegorman in April 2025. Under PATH 5 a new Annex building was provided by Rath Dara DEIS School, created specifically for Traveller and Roma students that covers Beauty, Hairdressing, Electronics and Woodwork. To date this has resulted in 2 Traveller young people commencing apprenticeships, 2 progressing to 3rd Level education and 3 completing SafePass, Manual Handling and Driver Theory. In Blakestown DEIS school, school uniforms were purchased for Roma girls, as the lack of money to purchase uniforms was identified as a barrier to attendance.

From September 2025, Empower is working with Balbriggan Travellers Project and Blanchardstown Traveller Development Project to scope out an information campaign and support service to promote the National Preferential Caravan Loan Scheme which was launched in November 2024. Details of this scheme are not widely known among the Fingal Traveller Community, but it includes: loans up to €80,000; preferential repayments rates that are lower than social housing rents; income-based repayments; and loan write-off options. Providing details of this scheme should prove to be another positive engagement tool.

Across Fingal, access to training, education and pro-social activities for Traveller women is severely restricted due to the lack of affordable childcare. This is a significant barrier for women from all SICAP target groups, but particularly impacts our Local Priority Target Groups which includes Travellers.

Conclusions

Analysis of Census 2022 and other data sources confirms that the Traveller Community in Fingal faces profound and persistent disadvantages across education, employment, affordable childcare, health, and housing. These disparities are compounded by systemic discrimination and social exclusion.

Empower's targeted engagement strategy under SICAP has delivered measurable outcomes by:

- **Building Capacity and Leadership:** Empower has supported local, Traveller-led organisations, through QQI-accredited training and Board-level collaboration. This has resulted in increased representation and leadership within the community.
- **Advocating for Affordable Childcare:** Empower has consistently highlighted the lack of affordable childcare across Fingal. This is particularly true for Traveller women. We have advocated for increased provision of same and have developed a blueprint to help solve this major barrier.
- **Delivering Frontline Support:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, Empower provided essential health and wellbeing resources to Traveller families, addressing immediate needs and reducing isolation.
- **Combating Food Poverty:** Weekly food and fuel supports have been sustained across Fingal, reaching over 280 individuals, in response to rising poverty and food insecurity.
- **Facilitating Holistic Referrals:** Empower's team members have built trust and facilitated referrals to health, housing, education, and financial supports, particularly for women in jobless households.
- **Promoting Civic Participation:** Voter education and registration initiatives have increased democratic engagement among Travellers in Fingal.
- **Enhancing Access to Education and Employment:** Through partnerships with TU Dublin, Rath Dara DEIS School and DSP, Empower has created pathways to third-level education, vocational training and Apprenticeships.
- **Advancing Anti-Racism Work:** Empower has led the development of county-wide anti-racism structures, including the Fingal Anti-Racism Network and the Organisational Anti-Racism Roadmap, with active Traveller participation.

These initiatives align with SICAP Goals 1 and 2 and contribute directly to the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) objectives and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II (2024–2028)^{xx}, particularly in the areas of:

- Combating racism and discrimination
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Supporting education, employment, and enterprise
- Enhancing participation, empowerment, and accountability

Empower’s approach demonstrates that sustained, collaborative, and culturally responsive engagement is key to achieving meaningful inclusion and equity for the Traveller Community.



Tin Smith workshop 2025

Endnotes

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- ⁱ The Central Statistics Office ran a special tabulation data set for Empower for Irish Travellers in Fingal.
- ⁱⁱ The Central Statistics Office inserted a question on the 2022 Census form, Empower asked it to include as a pilot question in 2019 in advance of the most recent Census. This now enables researchers examine long-term unemployment among different ethnic group for the first time. In doing so, it will enable the State track integration labour market outcomes for various ethnic groups than heretofore remained hidden.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Insights No11 Publication (1999) Community Development Strategies and Actions within the Integrated Local Development Programme, Area Development Management Ltd.
- ^{iv} Outcome G1-1.2 New Local Community Groups, Social Enterprises and Networks are formed.
- ^v Outcome G2-1.2 SICAP target groups complete lifelong learning programmes.
- ^{vi} Outcome G1-2.1 Local Community Groups, Social Enterprises and Networks have increased capacity to support SICAP target groups and thematic focus areas.
- ^{vii} Completed QQI Level 6 Course and since gone on to attend a Bachelor of Social Science (Community and Youth Work) at NUI Maynooth.
- ^{viii} Research conducted by POBAL established that infection rates were up to 50% higher in disadvantaged areas and that there were more COVID-19 cases among Travellers leading to higher ICU admissions (Pavee Point, online, 2024). Due to Traveller families living in cramped conditions, and the importance of extended family, they were at more at risk of contracting COVID-19.
- ^{ix} Outcome G2-1.1 SICAP target groups are informed about lifelong learning supports and services.
- ^x Outcome G2-3.1 SICAP target groups are informed about soft skills and wellbeing supports and services.
- ^{xi} Outcome G2-3.2 SICAP target groups participate in activities to improve their soft skills and wellbeing.
- ^{xii} Outcome G2-2.1 SICAP target groups are informed about labour market supports and services.
Outcome G2-2.2 SICAP target groups are better prepared to enter the labour market.
Outcome G2-2.3 SICAP target groups progress to employment.
- ^{xiii} Food poverty is measured by the percentage of individuals experiencing one of more of the following: 16 Food poverty measure was introduced in Constructing a Food Poverty Indicator for Ireland using the Survey on Income and Living Conditions • Unable to afford a meal with meat, or vegetarian equivalent, every second day • Unable to afford a weekly roast dinner (or vegetarian equivalent) • Missing one substantial meal in the last fortnight due to lack of money.
- ^{xiv} Parslickstown Gardens, St. Philomena’s Court, St. Philomena’s Park, St. Brigid’s Lawn , Barn Lodge, St. Mary’s and Morgan Place.
- ^{xv} Outcome G1-3.1 SICAP Implementers develop collaborative initiatives with relevant stakeholders that address identified gaps.
- ^{xvi} According to research conducted “62.7% of Traveller women disclosed that their mental health was not good enough for one or more days in the last 30 days; this was compared to 19.9% of GMS female cardholders” (Pavee Point, 2010).
- ^{xvii} Outcome G1-2.2 SICAP target groups are represented and participate in decision-making spaces that affect them.

^{xviii} Balbriggan African Community group, Balbriggan Community Women’s group, Balbriggan Integration Forum, Cairde, Community Women’s group, Team Zimbabwe Ireland and TU Dublin.

^{xix} Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2023). National Action Plan Against Racism. Available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/>

^{xx} Theme 1 Combating Racism and Discrimination
Theme 2 Children and Young People
Theme 3 Gender Equality
Theme 4 Health and Wellbeing
Theme 5 Employment and Enterprise
Theme 6 Accommodation
Theme7 Education
Theme 8: Culture, Heritage and Identity
Theme 9: Participation, Empowerment, Cooperation and Accountability