

Social Community Teams against Poverty (The Netherlands, 19-20 January 2016)

Feedback and comments based on the experiences of local partnership and inter-agency collaborations in the Limerick City and Urban Area, Ireland¹

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1. Introduction

This paper provides some comments and feedback on the Dutch Social Community Teams, based on the experiences of two different integrated approaches to addressing poverty and social exclusion in the Limerick City and urban area. A brief Irish policy context is provided first focusing on anti-poverty and integrated policy approaches, followed by an overview of the current local government and local development sector in Ireland. Two examples of integrated approaches to social inclusion are then provided – the local implementation of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Start Right initiative. Key strengths and challenges of these initiatives are highlighted and comparisons made with the experiences of the Dutch Social Community Teams.

2. Social Exclusion and Poverty in Ireland – National Policy Context

Ireland's approach to addressing social exclusion and poverty is set out in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016ⁱ (referred to as NAPinclusion, and now extended for one more year to 2017). NAPinclusion initially set an overall target to reduce the number of people experiencing consistent povertyⁱⁱ (as opposed to relative povertyⁱⁱⁱ) to between 2 % and 4 % by 2012, and to eliminate consistent poverty by 2016.

In 2012, Ireland revised and enhanced its overall target for poverty reduction. Renamed the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR), it aims to:

1. Reduce consistent poverty to 4 % by 2016 and to 2 % or less by 2020
2. Lift 70,000 children out of consistent poverty
3. Lift 200,000 people out of combined poverty^{iv} by 2020 (as part of Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target)

As part of the National Reform Programme 2015^v, submitted to the European Commission for the European Semester Process, Ireland received 7 Country Specific Recommendations, including:

- Improving active labour market policies, with a specific focus on the long-term unemployed, the low skilled and youth
- Addressing low work intensity households

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Furthermore, as part as Ireland's commitments to the Europe 2020 Strategy, and in addition to the National Poverty Targets outlined above, Ireland has also committed to:

- Raising the employment rate to 69-71 % for women and men aged 20-64, with a particular focus on young people, older workers and low-skilled workers.
- Reducing the number of 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in education or training to 8 %; and increasing the percentage of 30-34 year olds with a third level education to 60 %.

Progress against the achievement of NAPinclusion targets and the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction is documented in Annual Social Inclusion Reports^{vi} and the Social Inclusion Monitoring Reports^{vii}. The most recently released Social Inclusion Monitoring Report, (published in March 2015 and based on national data from 2013), revealed that:

- The economic recovery has led to a fall in unemployment
- The at-risk-of-poverty rate fell for the first time in 3 years, falling from 16.5 % in 2012 to 15.2 % in 2013
- Social transfers lifted nearly a quarter of the population above the at-risk-of-poverty rate

However, despite the recent economic recovery,

- The consistent poverty rate has increased to 8.2 %
- The consistent poverty rate among children rose to 11 %, requiring 100,000 to be lifted out of poverty by 2020
- Income poverty has remained unchanged
- No progress has been made towards the Europe 2020 target

NAPinclusion also set out a series of 12 high level goals across a number of lifecycle stages:

- Children
- People of Working Age
- Older People
- People with Disabilities
- Communities

It is intended that this lifecycle approach would support the development of more joined up and multi-disciplinary approaches to addressing poverty and social exclusion. Based on a whole government approach, a series of national policies and action plans have been introduced to work towards achieving Ireland's national goals and targets outlined above. They include (amongst others):

Children

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020^{viii} sets out a multi-dimensional approach to tackling child poverty. In particular, the Framework provides for the establishment and support of Children's and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) in every county in Ireland. Bringing together the key statutory and community providers of services to children and young people, the aim of each CYPSC is to provide an inter-agency structure at county level to oversee the joint planning and coordination of all services which impact on the lives of children, young people and their families, and to ultimately improve outcomes for all children and young people.

People of Working Age

Pathways to Work 2015^x aims to support unemployed people to return to work and complements the *Action Plan for Jobs*^x which focuses on promoting employment



growth. Under the auspices of the national employment service (Department of Social Protection), *Pathways to Work* has supported the roll-out of local “one stop shop” support centres for jobseekers and employers, known as *Intreo*. Case Officers based in local Intreo offices provide a range of tailored supports to jobseekers on an individual basis, and complement the supports provided by the Local Employment Service Network (a network of local employment support service providers for job seekers and employers).

Communities

The *Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)*^{xi} is the national local community development programme. It is funded by the Department of Community, Environment and Local Government, and co-funded by the European Social Fund with a special allocation under the Youth Employment Initiative. The Programme aims to address poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders. This programme is discussed in further detail below.

The publication of *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government*^{xii} in 2012 and the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act in 2014 has enhanced the role of the local government in the delivery of public services at local level, as well as placing a greater focus on community and citizen engagement at local level. In particular, it provides for a stronger role for local government in economic development, enterprise support and community and local development. *Putting People First* also introduced a process of “Alignment”, i.e., bringing the local government and local development sectors closer together in the planning and delivery of local and community development programmes.

3. Local and Community Development in Ireland – A Changing Landscape

Traditionally in Ireland, the primary functions of Local Authorities have included physical planning, housing and building, road transportation and safety, water supply and sewerage, development incentives and controls, environmental protection and recreation and amenities. These primary functions are governed by statute. However, in contrast to many other European and international models of local government, the role of Local Authorities in Ireland in services such as education, health, public transport, policing, community and welfare has been limited. However this is changing and a key principle of the Local Government Reform Agenda in Ireland is the need for greater community and citizen engagement structures and services. This change and commitment is evident in the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, local area-based organisations (formally known as “area-based partnerships”; now more generally referred to as Local Development Companies) have managed and implemented EU and exchequer-funded local and community development programmes in Ireland. Using “bottom up” and integrated approaches, they play a key role in promoting local community development and social inclusion. Local Development Companies are managed by multi-sectoral boards, comprising of representatives of statutory, community, environment, social partners, and local government sectors.

A National Local and Community Development Policy is currently being developed which will set out national priorities and a framework for a cross-government approach to development at local level. Each Local Authority in the country is now tasked with developing a 5-year Local, Community and Economic Plan (LCEP) which



will set out a local strategy for all state-funded local and community development interventions in their area. The development and implementation of each LCEP lies with newly established multi-sectoral Local and Community Development Committees (LCDC) in each local authority area. The significance of this approach is that it ensures that economic plans at local level have full regard to community needs and that all communities benefit from such plans. The development of an integrated economic and community plan will assist both sectors in the delivery of their objectives and targets.

The Limerick LCDC comprises of 17 members, made up of representatives of the Local Authority, Statutory Agencies, and the Environmental, Community and Voluntary Sectors, with executive support being provided by the Local Authority. In addition to developing the Local, Community and Economic Plan, the LCDC is also responsible for the planning and oversight of local and community development programmes, including the aforementioned Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), and discussed in further detail in the next section.

Finally, Ireland has established new statutory community and citizen engagement structures as part of the local government reform agenda. Public Participation Networks are currently being established at local level. Membership consists of three sectors – Environmental, Community & Voluntary and Social Inclusion. The PPN has nomination rights to statutory strategic policy and decision-making committees at local authority level, including the LCDC's.

4. Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

SICAP came into being in April 2015. As stated above, it aims to address poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders. It has 3 overarching goals:

1. To support individuals and community groups to address issues of social exclusion and inequality
2. To support individuals to participate in lifelong learning, education and training opportunities
3. To support individuals to access employment and self-employment

Although the programme is a national programme with overall goals, objectives and target outputs set by central Government, it is implemented locally. Oversight of implementation within each local Government area lies with the LCDC. However, actual implementation of the programme rests with Local Development Companies. In the Limerick urban area, the programme is being implemented by PAUL Partnership and 9 community-based partner organisations.

PAUL Partnership

Established in 1989, People Action Against Unemployment Ltd (PAUL Partnership) is a Local Development Company that works with communities that have benefited least from economic and social development and aims to promote social inclusion and improve the quality of life of people living in communities in the Limerick urban area. It has a long history of managing and implementing EU and exchequer-funded local and community development programmes from Poverty 3 to SICAP.

PAUL Partnership is managed by a multi-sectoral Board of Directors, comprising of representatives from the community sector, state sector, social partners, and the Local Authority. It implements a range of programmes across a number of areas including employment support, education and lifelong learning, early years and family support, and community development. Two programmes that it implements,



in collaboration with community and statutory partners, are the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Start Right Programme.

SICAP in the Limerick Urban Area

SICAP in the Limerick urban area is being implemented through a partnership approach between PAUL Partnership (Lead Partner) and 9 community organisations. These 9 community organisations are based in some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged communities in Limerick (and in Ireland). Amongst other actions, SICAP staff work with individuals and members on a one-on-one or caseload basis to identify a pathway to education, lifelong learning, employment or self-employment; and to continue to support them as they progress along that path. This support is targeted at specific groups, namely: unemployed individuals, youth unemployed, people living in disadvantaged communities, people with disabilities, new communities, Roma, lone parents, and the Traveller Community. Staff involved in this work are referred to as “SICAP Caseload Workers”.

When an individual registers for one-on-one support under SICAP, the Caseload Worker first works with them to develop a Personal Action Plan. This Personal Action Plan sets out the specific needs of the individual in terms of accessing education and/or employment; and outlines a plan of action to achieve the individual’s personal goals. This may include identifying barriers that may be preventing the individual from achieving their goals, for example, literacy difficulties, personal debt, housing issues, health issues, and lack of information and knowledge about available services and supports. The role of the Caseload Worker is to work with the individual to address these barriers by linking them into appropriate service providers and supporting them to take up available social inclusion supports, education provision and/or employment opportunities. By continuing to work with the individual on a one-on-one basis over a period of time, it is expected that the individual will be more likely achieve their personal goals and progress towards or into education and/or employment or self-employment.

Strengths and Challenges of SICAP Caseload Work

While SICAP is still in its early days of implementation, a number of key strengths and challenges have been identified to date. These are summarised in the table below:

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physical presence in target (and local) communities ▪ SICAP staff are known to many members of the target communities ▪ Strong linkages established with local education providers ▪ Strong linkages established with local community groups ▪ Referral protocol established with local Intreo office ▪ Development of a citywide frontline staff team ▪ Greater opportunity for more intensive and sustained support with individuals ▪ Established link with local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Caseload model requires more time with individuals; it requires ongoing follow-up. It therefore can be very labour intensive. ▪ Diverse needs of individuals requires staff to be knowledgeable of a broad range of services and supports ▪ Narrow focus of programme’s target outcomes (employment/education) vs. broad needs of clients. Addressing broader issues (e.g. family support; social isolation of older people) not a priority outcome of programme. ▪ Targets being set centrally for local level employment outputs that don’t reflect existing local area employment provision ▪ Ensuring all clients are members of SICAP target group(s) (older people are excluded) ▪ Limited scope for broader preventative strategies ▪ Accessing the most hard to reach



Although SICAP is implemented locally within the oversight of the Local and Community Development Committee, it is still essentially a national programme. It is therefore required to work within a national framework with goals, objectives, and target outcomes that are established by central government. While the LCDC has some scope to make adjustments to the programme to meet local social inclusion needs, it is limited. Targets for the number of individuals that each SICAP implementer must work with, the range of target groups that they can or cannot work with, and the type of supports and outcomes that are “counted” are all largely determined nationally.

Comparisons with Social Community Teams in the Netherlands

In many aspects, SICAP Caseload Workers are similar to the “generalists” within the Social Community Teams (SCTs) in the Netherlands. By operating on a case-by-case basis, both aim to place the individual at the centre of the service, and to support the individual to identify and progress along a pathway to particular individual goals. A key difference between the two models however is the formal presence of a team or network of “experts” or “specialists” within the SCT that will work with the “generalist” and individual in this process. However, while formal team or network structures are not in place, the SICAP caseload workers have established strong linkages with local education and employment support providers. These local relationships enhance SICAP worker’s ability to meet clients’ needs by supporting the referrals of individuals between services, ensuring that services are provided in an integrated fashion, and avoiding duplication. (Note: a formal referral protocol is in place between Intreo and SICAP Caseload Workers in relation to self-employment supports. The Local Employment Service is also managed by PAUL Partnership which also supports referrals to and from SICAP).

Another key difference between the SCT and the SICAP caseload model is the focus of support. While the SCT has a very broad remit, reflecting the diverse range of causes and outcomes of poverty and social exclusion, SICAP focuses primarily on activation (and specifically of people of working age). It therefore limits the capacity of SICAP caseload workers to meet the social inclusion needs of older people, or needs relating to broader issues such as housing, health, personal indebtedness, family support etc. While these issues may be explored with individuals, they are done so as a means to addressing barriers to employment and education, and not for an outcome in themselves.

The different governance structures are also noteworthy. In the Netherlands, the decentralisation process that has taken place has provided local municipalities with significant autonomy and responsibilities in terms of addressing poverty and social exclusion. While the local government sector in Ireland has undergone much change in recent years, with an increased role in the provision of local services, the role of central government is still strong in this process, as can be seen in the prominent role it still occupies in terms of the strategic direction and implementation of SICAP.

Finally, it is interesting to note that despite the differences between the two approaches/models, they share many of the same challenges. In particular – the need to have a broad yet detailed body of knowledge in relation to a range of diverse services and supports, the lack of scope for more preventative strategies, and the difficulties engaging the “hard to reach” or the “invisible poor”.

5. ABC Start Right – Community Wraparound

ABC Start Right Limerick is another example of a local area integrated approach to social inclusion. This inter-agency collaboration is funded under the Area-Based



Childhood (ABC) Programme (co-funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Atlantic Philanthropies), with match-funding from the Local Authority Regeneration Programme. The project is an early intervention and prevention initiative which aims to achieve better learning, health and well-being outcomes for children from 0-6 years in the Northside, Garryowen and City Centre areas of Limerick City. The choice of selected areas is based on their specific but different needs: the north side of the city has consistently high levels of need and poor outcomes for children but with high levels of services and community infrastructure and strong levels of engagement with families and young people; the city centre is an area with very high levels of need but without a strong community infrastructure.

By working with families, early years practitioners and local service providers, Start Right seeks to enhance the capacity of parents, families and services to work collaboratively towards better child outcomes and develop integrated work practices and resource-sharing in the early years sector across statutory, community and voluntary agencies, as well as to create and strengthen links between all service providers that work with young children.

A key element of the ABC Start Right is the Community Wraparound Programme. Through collaboration between statutory and community service providers, early years settings and ongoing communication with parents, a continuum of tailored, high-quality, user-friendly and integrated services and supports are being provided. These supports cover the different stages from ante-natal through various developmental stages of the first three years of a child's life, and include:

- Ante-natal home visit by a Public Health Nurse (PHN)
- Mother-to-mother support by specifically trained Community Mothers
- Home visit by a PHN within 48 hours of discharge from maternity hospital
- Parent and baby/toddler groups
- Baby massage and reflexology
- One-on-one home visits by PHN at 3 months, 7-9 months, 18-24 months, 3-3½ years developmental stages
- Baby-weaning workshops
- Incredible Years Parent and Baby/Toddler Programmes
- Oral Language programme
- Creative Therapies, psychology and other parenting supports

ABC Start Right Limerick is managed by a multi-agency Programme Management Committee under the overall governance of the Limerick Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC). PAUL Partnership is acting as the lead agency on behalf of Limerick CYPSC, and hosts the employment of the Project Staff Team, including the Community Wraparound Programme Co-ordinator (a Public Health Nurse). The Local Authority is a member of CYPSC.

Strengths and Challenges

A fundamental strength of the Community Wraparound Programme is that it is a process that provides children and their families with flexible and ongoing support that meets their particular needs. It focuses on connecting families, service providers and community partners in effective relationships and support networks. Based on a shared approach, it aims to provide child-centred services and to ensure that all services are talking to each other and to parents, thereby ensuring that parents are fully engaged in decisions that affect their lives and that the supports provided actually meet their specific needs. The Community Wraparound Programme is therefore based on the principle of *"meeting parents where they*



are". In essence, within community wraparound a team works to identify the underlying needs, interests and limitations of families and service providers, and to develop a plan that addresses these interests, using natural community supports wherever possible.

The fact that the Community Wraparound Programme commences at the antenatal stage and provides universal supports to parents and children in the target area means that the programme has a strong preventative focus to it.

Based on the principle of 'creating change from within', the employment of a Public Health Nurse as Programme Co-ordinator is significant in terms of the future sustainability and mainstreaming of the integrated approaches of Community Wraparound. However, the question of sustainability is also a challenge for the Programme. The Programme is a three year funded programme. Therefore, the question of the long-term sustainability and/or mainstreaming of the integrated work practices must always be kept to the fore of all project planning stages.

Inter-agency working is a core principle and strength of the programme. However, this also brings its own set of challenges. Different organisational cultures, different understandings of best practice, different use of terminology and language all exist, and can lead to unanticipated delays in decision-making and implementation. Likewise, ensuring the right mix of people at the decision-making table can be challenging. This includes the need to have people that are senior enough in their organisations to make the sufficient decisions, but yet have an understanding of how these decisions are implemented "on the ground". The need for some organisations to refer back to their own decision-making structures can often lead to delays as well as potential conflicts between local and national priorities.

Comparisons with Social Community Teams in the Netherlands

Similar to SICAP, ABC Start Right and specifically, its Community Wraparound Programme share some common features with the Social Community Teams in the Netherlands. Both aim to provide a single, central and easily approachable access point to services in the community. Both are striving to bring about change in existing service provision and organisational structures in order to achieve greater outcomes for communities, families, and (in the specific case of ABC Start Right) children. A key difference between the projects though is the role of universal, preventative measures within ABC Start Right, as well as the fact that Community Wraparound is not a service or a case-management model in itself. Rather it collaborates with existing service providers and families to provide flexible, tailored supports to families on an individual needs basis.

6. Concluding Comments

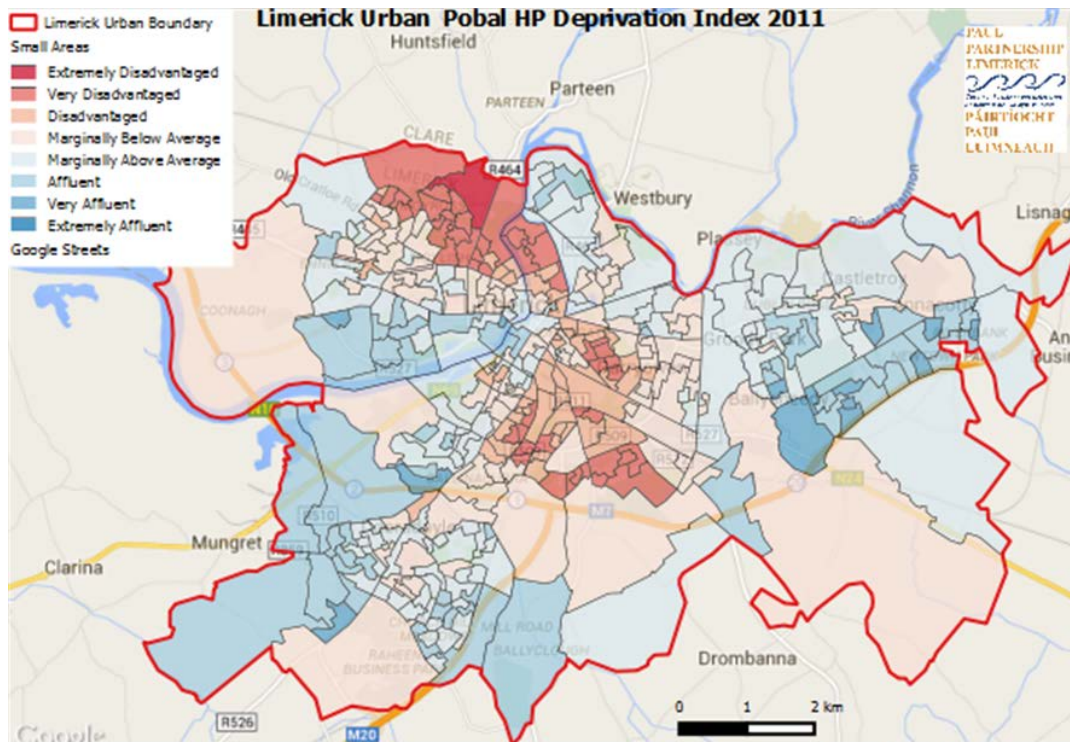
This paper provided an overview of the national and local context for integrated approaches to tackling specific aspects to poverty and social inclusion in the Limerick urban area in Ireland. While the policy context is primarily set at national level, there has been a recent move to enhance the role of local government in local and community development, as well as to implement more integrated approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion at national and local levels. Two examples of integrated programmes were presented. Although both are very different, they still share many of the key strengths and challenges experienced by the Dutch SCTs. Particular challenges include managing local versus national priorities, balancing general versus specialised skills of staff, managing different multi-agency perspectives within an integrated initiative, and ensuring a focus on preventative measures and sustainability. The authors of this report very much look forward to discussing these issues in greater detail in the forthcoming Peer Review.



Appendix – Limerick Urban Area

Limerick is based in the south west of Ireland. The urban area has a total population of 90,820. A quarter of the population in the urban area live in communities classified as either “Disadvantaged”, “Very Disadvantaged”, or “Extremely Disadvantaged” in the most recent census. These areas are highlighted in the map below. Six of the ten most disadvantaged communities in the country are located in the Limerick urban area, including the single most disadvantaged community in the country. Unemployment rates, including youth unemployment, are much higher in these local areas, compared to the average rates for the region and the country. In fact, the Limerick urban area has twice as many unemployment blackspots than any other part of the country. Educational attainment rates are also considerably lower in a number of local communities compared to other parts of the Limerick Urban area and to the national average. The percentage of the population who have left school with just a primary education is two to three times higher than the national average in these communities.

Map 1



End Notes

ⁱ Government of Ireland, 2007. National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. Dublin: The Stationery Office

ⁱⁱ Consistent Poverty is being at risk of poverty and experiencing deprivation in relation to one or more of the following indicators: unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day; unable to afford new, not second-hand, clothes; without heating at some stage in the past year due to lack of money; experienced debt problems arising from ordinary living expenses; unable to afford two pairs of strong shoes; unable to afford a roast, or equivalent, once a week; unable to afford a warm waterproof coat; no substantial meal for at least one day in the past two weeks due to lack of money.

ⁱⁱⁱ Relative Income Poverty defines those who are poor as being below a certain income threshold, usually 60 % of the median disposable income. Median income is the figure that divides the income distribution in society into two equal parts, half having incomes above the median and half having incomes below the median. Persons below the 60 % median income level are regarded as being “at risk of poverty”.

^{iv} Combined Poverty refers to consistent poverty plus at risk of poverty and basic deprivation

^vhttp://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Work_Of_The_Department/Economic_and_International/Economic/NRP/

^{vi} Department of Social Protection (2015), Social Inclusion Report Incorporating Annual Reports for 2013 & 2014, Dublin: Department of Social Protection.

^{vii} Department of Social Protection (2015), Social Inclusion Monitor 2013, Dublin: Department of Social Protection.

^{viii} Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014), Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020, Dublin: The Stationery Office

^{ix} <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/pathways-to-work-2015.pdf>

^x <https://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-2015.pdf>

^{xi}

[https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme%20\(SICAP\)/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme%20(SICAP)/Pages/default.aspx)

^{xii} <http://www.environ.ie/en/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,31309,en.pdf>

