

European Social Fund Plus

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the EU's key instrument for investing in people.

The aim of the ESF+ is to achieve high employment levels, fair social protection, and a skilled and resilient workforce for the future world of work, in line with the principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The ESF+ is focused on improving employment and education opportunities, as well as enhancing social inclusion and tackling poverty.

Since joining the EU, Ireland has received over €7 billion from the European Union to support actions in the areas of employment, education

and skills, and social inclusion, opening doors to skills, work, qualifications and a more inclusive society for all.

In addition to this, Ireland's current ESF+ Programme has a budget of over €1 billion, co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union. The programme aims to help over 340,000 people across the country through the range of courses, schemes and projects that it will fund over its lifetime.

The ESF+ is managed by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Supporting self-employment

County Kildare LEADER Partnership is helping to tackle long-term unemployment and encourage self-employment with the support of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and ESF+

“County Kildare LEADER Partnership (CKLP) has been operational since 2009 as the Local Development Company for County Kildare,” says Pat Leogue, CEO of the Partnership.

“The company delivers a range of social inclusion and rural development programmes on behalf of Government Departments and agencies.”

CKLP has been responsible for the implementation of SICAP since 2015. SICAP, which aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality, is co-funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the European Union, through the ESF+.

“In the current SICAP 2018-2023 period, CKLP has assisted approximately 800 individuals and 70 groups per annum, with a range of supports focused on the most disadvantaged areas

Mary Minogue, Enterprise and Social Enterprise Support Worker with County Kildare LEADER Partnership



and groups in the county,” says Pat. “One of the main supports provided by SICAP in Kildare has been to assist individuals to become self-employed.”

SICAP creates awareness of the supports available for those who would like to explore setting up their own business, which include the 14-week Enterprise Skills Programme, the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, the Short-Term Enterprise Support Allowance (funded by the Department of Social Protection), pre-enterprise training, coaching and mentoring sessions, themed workshops, business plan development and networking opportunities.

Pat says, “Like many other aspects of SICAP, interagency collaboration is a key factor in providing the best support. This is achieved through collaboration with organisations like the Department of Social Protection, the Local Enterprise Office, and the local Education and Training Board.”



Rosemary Lawlor, Tribe Art Studio

MENTORING

Mary Minogue, Enterprise and Social Enterprise Support Worker with CKLP, says, “Jobseekers that become SICAP clients are offered a pathway of support and mentoring as they set their business up.

“Each individual is assisted to develop a Personal Action Plan, where their readiness for self-employment is explored. They are offered additional one-to-one business meetings to support the creation of a business plan in preparation for their application for the Department of Social Protection Enterprise Support Schemes - the Short-Term Enterprise Support Scheme and the Back-to-Work Enterprise Allowance. Each client attends a start-your-own business course as a prerequisite to availing of further supports, and clients are offered several options to do this depending on their readiness for self-employment.”

Having been self-employed herself for over 10 years, Mary was attracted to the role of supporting others to look at self-employment as an option. Now working with CKLP since 2018, Mary finds that “with the right encouragement and support, many clients would never go back to working for someone else once they've had their own business”.

ENTREPRENEURS SUPPORTED BY SICAP

Over the lifetime of the SICAP Programme, CKLP has supported over 264 individuals to set up their own businesses and become entrepreneurs.

Rosemary Lawlor from Tribe Art Studio in Castledermot, Kildare, is one such example. Rosemary had worked in a pre-school setting for eight years and having found herself out of work, she decided she wanted to set up her own business.

She took part in an Enterprise Skills Programme provided by CKLP through a Community Employment Scheme. Rosemary was then assisted by Mary Minogue and her colleagues, funded under SICAP, and received mentoring to apply for the Short-Term Enterprise Support Allowance. This helped Rosemary set up Tribe Art Studios in late 2019. Today, her thriving business provides art classes, workshops and parties for all ages. Rosemary says, “We now work with SICAP doing art workshops with various community groups.

“I am a single parent and this was a crazy pipedream to have. I have never been happier doing this and I don't think I will ever do anything else. The dream can become real with the right supports!”

According to Pat Leogue of County Kildare LEADER Partnership, the support from SICAP and ESF+ is important in tackling unemployment, poverty, and social inclusion in Ireland for two main reasons.

“Firstly, the additional resources are vital in supporting the local development sector, as there are growing demands for funding and an increasing range of needs to be met. Secondly, it is not often acknowledged that the involvement of the EU and ESF+ brings additional knowledge and expertise from the experience of our European partners. This assists in tackling social inclusion issues in our society.”

Pat adds, “CKLP recognises that the population in Ireland is continuing to grow above international averages and that this has implications in terms of prioritising resources and investment. The key priorities for the company over the next five years are to continue to support individuals, to respond to and assist communities, and to continue to develop collaborations with a wide range of stakeholders.”