

SICAP 2023 Case Study



Social Inclusion &
Community Activation
Programme

Comhar na nOileán CTR – Goal 1 Project

Target Group – New Communities

Supports to New Communities on the West Cork Islands



Cork West Islands (18-7)



Introduction



Comhar na nOileán CTR aims to support, provide, and deliver supports to sustainable permanent communities on the inhabited offshore islands primarily and any other adjacent peripheral area whose development is intrinsically linked to that of the islands.

Comhar na nOileán's mission is to support balanced sustainable development, address decline in island populations and communities, promote equal and equitable access and opportunity to education, training, employment services through the delivery of programmes and initiatives using area-based local development strategies and a bottom-up community-driven development approach.

This case study will focus on the efforts of Comhar na nOileán to work with new communities on the West Cork Islands as part of its work with SICAP. Working with new communities such as refugees can be difficult at times as there are a variety of problems to overcome such as culture, language, and integration. Specifically, this case study will be looking at how the Ukrainian arrivals have settled in on Sherkin more than a year after their arrival. It will also examine the tremendous efforts on Oileán Chléire to support the arrival of a Syrian refugee family into the local community.

A Year on Sherkin: How SICAP has helped new arrivals from the Ukraine

The first Ukrainians arrived on Sherkin just over a year ago in early August. The youngest was just seven months old and there were also several elderly individuals among the first arrivals. Over the first year a number of these initial arrivals have moved to different locations but have been replaced by new arrivals throughout the last year. Comhar na nOileán has provided

support for people who wish to leave the island for assorted reasons such as health issues, family reunification, and emigration.

A previous case study looked at how the first Ukrainian arrivals settled into their new environment on Sherkin Island. This section of the case study will look at how the Ukrainian community that are still resident on Sherkin have settled into their new surroundings, and the difficulties that they have both overcome and are still facing.

Mental Health and Wellness

Comhar na nOileán applied to the Wellness fund through Tusla. With this funding we supported families and individuals to take part in events such as trips to see the locality and experience Irish heritage, such as Bantry House, Blarney Castle, and Cobh. This helped to get people out and about during the early part of 2023, supporting connection and mental health. We further supplemented this with other trips over the Easter period and a trip to Oileán Chléire for the Fastnet Film experience. Also, we have supported a kayaking experience for members of the community which proved very successful.

Comhar na nOileán have worked to develop a good working relationship with the hotel manager and owner while supporting connections with the wider island community and Local Development Group. Our staff member and the hotel manager work together to support the reunification of families in the hotel.



Integration

Integration is a key part of our work; it is a complex and enriching process, and it takes time and effort.

We have helped to encourage cultural awareness and developing respect by supporting an open mind and a respectful attitude to understanding diverse cultures and customs. We have worked on community engagement by creating opportunities for all the community to interact and engage with one another through the arts and community events.



On an ongoing basis we ensure that the members of the community are connected in with activities and events in Sherkin Island and are supported to take part. These activities include coffee mornings, an arts and craft workshop, yoga, and pottery to name but a few.

We have worked with the children of the island to provide supports for integration around art and crafts and beach days. We are also working with the ETB about listening to children's voices and setting up events and activities that reflect where they are at.

Comhar na nOileán have supported the Sherkin Island community with dialogue around challenges and difficulties that may arise. We work with the local school and the ferry service and a local bus provider to ensure that children get home from school safely as there is no bus service for the 2pm school run.

Employment

Comhar na nOileán have worked to help get people some level of employment. Several people work in Skibbereen and Baltimore in the hospitality sector, and with the onset of the season more people have taken up part time seasonal employment both on and off the island in various locations.

Comhar na nOileán's work with the Ukrainian community is ongoing, we have employed a member of the community to provide onsite help with social welfare, form filling, appointments, support in other areas of health and wellbeing and translation services. This has proved to be very successful and has been a great help to many of the Ukrainians resident on Sherkin as many of them have a very poor level of English.

Some of the key duties of the roles include:

- On first contact, identify immediate need and contact Comhar na nOileán staff and establish links as appropriate with local services and relevant community groups, and to work closely where appropriate with other service providers.
- Carry out assessments and reviews and develop and implement support plans with those displaced by war on the island.
- Document residents and ensure all information is recorded e.g., age, gender, room assigned, Personal Public Service numbers.
- To visit families and individuals in other emergency accommodation on the Island if need be.
- Assist in implementing a programme of social activities as organised by or with residents and people using services as appropriate.
- Assist Comhar na nOileán staff with the implementation of agreed care plans with residents.
- Act as an advocate when appropriate

- Support residents to access services.
- Liaise regularly with Comhar na Oileán staff regarding any needs that arise within the community.
- Be available to provide translation at times.

Future Projects

An application was made to Reach funding through the ETB for the creation of an ethno-drama which was unfortunately unsuccessful. The ETB remain interested in this project and have requested more funds from SOLAS, and if the ETB are successful, we hope this project will be viewed positively.

Ethno-drama is an educational research method which uses the verbatim words of research participants to form a theatre script devised by a playwright in collaboration with the participants.

The proposed project, 'Interculturalism and Contemporary Island Living: Staging Sherkin 2023', would involve an ethno-drama which will explore interculturalism and contemporary island living on Sherkin Island. This will seek to support peer-to-peer learning and build bonds between islanders, as well as providing an avenue for creative self-expression in a safe place. Throughout history, the theatre has contributed to learning, providing a mirror to individuals and societies, and supporting social change.

For many Ukrainian arrivals the first year living on Sherkin proved to be a difficult one. As with many people who are displaced it can be a challenge to integrate into their new environment. Projects such as this one are worth pursuing as they are a fresh and innovative way of encouraging the integration of new communities on the West Cork Islands through SICAP.



Our Efforts to accommodate a Syrian family on Oileán Chléire



A scene of devastation from the war in Syria

As part of Comhar na nOileán's efforts to help new communities we have been attempting to relocate a Syrian refugee family to Oileán Chléire. Beginning in 2011, the Syrian civil war has resulted in the death of over half a million people and the displacement of over fifteen million. The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established in 2015 as a response to the humanitarian crisis that was unfolding in southern Europe. One of the main reasons for this crisis was the ongoing civil war in Syria with millions fleeing the country. For its part, Ireland has welcomed just over 2,000 Syrian refugees with 76 arriving from Beirut in May 2022. As part of a cooperation project with the IRPP Comhar na nOileán were involved in the attempted relocation of a Syrian refugee family to Oileán Chléire.

Ireland has also played a role in assisting the relief effort and has so far accommodated a total of 2,184 Syrian refugees. These Syrians have been resettled in Ireland under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). As with the Ukrainian population on Sherkin the Syrian refugees are fleeing a devastating and destructive conflict with many experiencing extreme trauma. This section of the case study will highlight our co-operation with the IRPP and the Department of Justice in our efforts to relocate a Syrian family to Oileán Chléire as part of our overall SICAP efforts to help new communities adapt and integrate into their new surroundings.

This section of the case study will also give an overview of Oileán Chléire and highlight the work of the Cléire Community Sponsorship Plan and the work that the Cléire Community Sponsorship Group (CCSG) is currently undertaking in its attempts to raise funds and help sponsor a Syrian refugee family on the island.

Oileán Chléire Overview



Cape Clear Island or Oileán Chléire is situated in County Cork about 12km off the southwest coast of Ireland. It is a Gaeltacht Island, 5km long by 1.6km wide with a resident population of about 100 people. This number increases to a little over 200 during the summer months. The Island has many attractions and amenities as well as an active community with numerous organised events throughout the year.

Oileán Chléire is a Gaeltacht area and Irish is the official language, but English is widely spoken and understood. Currently there is one primary school on the island with two teachers and five students. Children must travel to the mainland to receive a secondary education and return home at weekends and holidays. The lack of a secondary school makes it difficult to attract young families to move to the island.

On Oileán Chléire, most people own their own homes with a few people also renting. Suitable housing availability on the island is a problem as many homes are vacant during the winter and are only used as summer holiday homes.

While most things on the island are within walking distance a public bus is available. Most, if not all, essential services are available on the island including a post-office, medical centre, fuel, public water supply, recycling facilities and public restrooms. The island also has a helicopter pad for emergency medical evacuations. The island has a ferry service that has two sailings a day during winter, and up to four during the summer months. This ferry also acts as the cargo service for the island.

Employment on the island is varied with many people working more than one job. Areas of employment include tourism, farming, fishing, IT and arts and crafts. Food and drink is another major source of employment, and the island boasts a number of bars and restaurants as well as a gin distillery.

Cléire Community Sponsorship Plan

The IRRP was set up in 2015 in response to the humanitarian crisis in southern Europe that witnessed the mass migration of people from war-torn areas, particularly the Middle East. Since 2015 the IRRP has welcomed over 2,000 refugees from its target of 4,000. By using both state centred and Community Sponsorship Programmes they are aiming to meet this figure over the coming years.

Cléire Community Sponsorship (CCSG) was formed to welcome and support a refugee family on Oileán Chléire and received it's letter of acceptance from the IRRP on December 18th 2020. The group took part in the pre arrival preparations and ensuring that the needs of the family would be met upon arrival. This work included registrations, applications, housing, school placement and anything else that was required. Contact was also made with all the necessary state bodies so that they could help with the integration of the new family.

When a family would arrive, all group members were expected to provide support but to also respect their space and to be aware of the needs of the family. As the family integrates more and more into the community the plan is to gradually reduce support and encourage the family to take action of their own and become fully independent members of the community.

Initial Attempts at Welcoming a Syrian Family

Eibhlin Byrne, head of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) with the Department of Justice, paid a visit to Oileán Chléire on Friday the 11/03/22. She viewed the accommodation, toured the island, and met with the group to discuss the ongoing process for the resettlement of a Syrian family on the island.

Eibhlin at that time was considering two sisters as a possible match with our community. However, that decision was out of our hands, and it will be up to the families to decide if Oileán Chléire is right for them. As a result of Eibhlin's discussions during her visit to Beirut at the end of April 2022 the sisters decided not to come to the island. Another family was identified during that visit, and they initially accepted the offer of an island home. Unfortunately, within days of the delegations return to Ireland, the family contacted the IRPP to say that they would not take up the offer. The group were devastated but were philosophical about this turn of events.

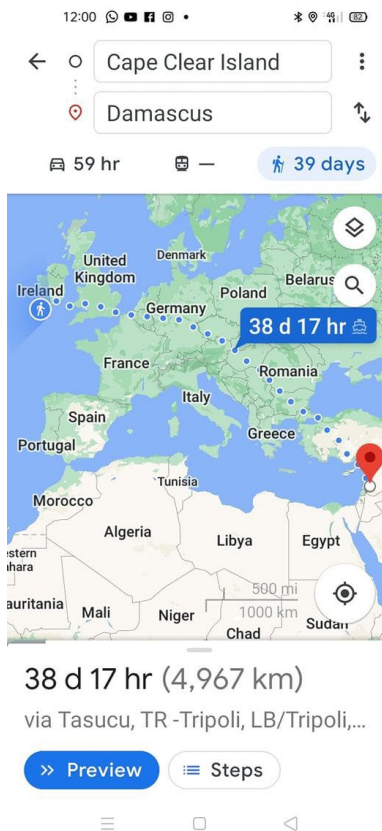


Although committed in finding a refugee family to make Oileán Chléire their home, we are aware that there are limitations with regards to what Oileán Chléire can cater to and this has been a challenge for the IRPP. We were constantly communicating with the IRPP to look for updates and push them on this issue. The IRRP contacted us saying that they were finding it a challenge to find families with the right age profile of children from the perspective of education.

Fundraising



As part of their obligations in participating in the Community Sponsorship Plan communities must raise funds to help a refugee family settle in the area. To achieve this aim CCSG along with iDonate organised a fundraising event which saw participants walk or run the distance it takes to reach Damascus in Syria and back to Oileán Chléire.



People were able to track their virtual journey online and overall, the fundraiser was a tremendous success raising well over €5,000. Overall, the CCSG has raised €10,000 which will help with initial accommodation and transport costs. An eight-bedroom cottage was also made available by one of the group's members to the arriving Syrian family.



To keep up to date with the work of the CCSG a Facebook page can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064802320090> or on their website www.cuaisin.ie

The Arrival

In late February the good news was received that a suitable family had been potentially found. Between the official letters of acceptance and the arrival of the family there is about a 30 working days turnaround (6 weeks). During this time travel related health checks are done, exit visas and other official paperwork. By this point we were looking at welcoming the family within two months at the earliest.

In early May it was confirmed that a family consisting of a father and mother along with three young children would be arriving on the island in early June subject to international clearance and the required legal checks. During this stage the IRPP were engaging with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) about scheduling flights for the family.

Before the arrival of the family Comhar na nOileán suggested that since it had been a while since the members of the CSG had undergone a training that a refresher course with Nasc should be arranged.

A Zoom meeting with the family was also arranged and on the 16th of May members of the CSG were able to speak with the family for the first time. This was very emotional for the group after working for so long and having many disappointments along the way.

On the 29th of May we finally received confirmation of the family's arrival dates. This led to a flurry of activities from volunteers who worked very hard to ensure that the house was ready and stocked with essential supplies. Three members of the CSG had learned some basic Arabic and this was a great help in being able to communicate with the family. Members of the group went down to the pier to meet the family and when they stepped off the boat for the first time there was a large turnout from the local community to greet them.

Over the past couple of years, the work done by Comhar na nOileán through SICAP has played a vital part in assisting new communities such as Ukrainian and Syrian refugees settle into new homes and surroundings. Comhar na nOileán work with many small island communities such as Sherkin and Oileán Chléire. The local community groups, along with many individuals, deserve great credit for all their hard work and ability to overcome adversity in making the islands of Sherkin and Oileán Chléire a welcoming and safe environment for new arrivals. Through SICAP, Comhar na nOileán have been able to engage with the new arrivals on Sherkin and Oileán Chléire to help them with both day-to-day needs as well as more long-term goals such as integration, positive mental health, and employment. Co-operation is also a vital part of Comhar na nOileán's SICAP work both at a local and national level. Without this co-operation it would be impossible to carry out the level of work that is required with assisting the new communities detailed in this case study.



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