

West Cork Development Partnership

18-6 Bandon Kinsale

Supporting a Start-Up Social Enterprise,

The story of Recruit Refugees Ireland

Goal 1 / Social Enterprise

New Communities

Introduction:

The topic of our case study for 2022 will be to describe the support provided by the SICAP programme to assist with the establishment of a social enterprise – Recruit Refugees Ireland (RRI).

Our SICAP development officer was introduced to the primary promoter of Recruit Refugees Ireland, Roos Demol in 2019 (a native of Belgium with multi-language skills). As it often the case with supporting fledgling social enterprises, our SICAP support involved assistance both for the individual promoter and support for the actual entity itself.

It has been our experience over the years that social enterprises require a key principal promoter or entrepreneur to drive the project forward, particularly in its early years. This reality is well recognised by the funding and mentorship offered by Social Entrepreneurs Ireland where the focus of the support is on the key promoter or entrepreneur involved.



In this context, the customary governance requirements can often present a challenge at the early stages of a social enterprise, as best practice in governance of not for profit NGO organisations requires a clear separation of governance and decision-making from employees (or would-be employees) from the directorship / trusteeship and board of management roles for the entity concerned. This makes sense for large and established entities but is a much greater challenge for fledgling entities, when decisions are being

made on an on-going basis and there is not a sufficient operational capacity to justify bringing all these micro decisions to another forum.

In our Case Study, Roos Demol (pronounced Rose) is the key promoter and social entrepreneur behind Recruit Refugees Ireland so this case study is as much a story about our support for Roos herself as the story of support for RRI.

Our story will also explore the trials and tribulations experienced in setting up a new social enterprise and while the project is currently delivering some very positive outcomes, it remains an on-going journey and so our story is not one of a dramatic success but more an indication of the toil, grind and commitment which establishing a social enterprise demands.

Background:

Prior to our initial involvement with Roos in the year 2019, Roos had been part of a voluntary group to establish the “Citadel” music ensemble in the Kinsale Road Direct Provision centre in Cork. That world music project had proved to be very successful and had achieved a phenomenal impact in terms of wellbeing of participating musicians, other residents in the residential centre who enjoyed rehearsals



and performances, but also a wider societal impact as the group frequently played at public events in Cork and elsewhere and demonstrated a positive multicultural impact of the presence of individuals seeking international protection in the community. (At a time when a significant proportion of the media coverage and commentariat was negative).

The Citadel Music ensemble (Building Bridges with Music) swiftly mutated into a larger project including instrument donations, encouraging musical activities in other direct provision centres, but also advocating for the rights of asylum seekers in the community.

So, Roos found herself in a position of advocating for and representing the needs of Asylum Seekers at various fora and networks. The City of Sanctuary movement is a good example of a parallel initiative which was taking place simultaneously. Roos of course was involved in this project too. There was participation of the direct provision centre residents in these networks, but the



transient nature of their status, language barriers and lack of understanding of Irish cultural administrative norms also required a resident advocate to lead this work and Roos filled this gap.

The success of Citadel, led by Roos and supported by other volunteers in the community, provided an incentive for Roos to further develop a career in this field and it was with this in mind that Roos first approached SICAP for support.

Exploring Options:

At this point in time, Roos herself was not in employment and had been volunteering significant time and energies toward working with Asylum Seekers in Cork but had no income stream and so was also in need to find a viable livelihood for herself. Roos is a highly skilled and knowledgeable individual, who could easily find employment in commercial business, but Roos was determined to find a way to marry her passion for working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees with providing an income for herself and her family. So our SICAP support commenced from this perspective.

At this time, the treatment of Asylum Seekers by the Irish state had been subject to criticism on a number of fronts.

The unsuitability of direct provision centres themselves have been highlighted many times along with the slow, archaic and lethargic decision making process.

Until this time Asylum Seekers also had no right to work. This right to work, issue had been

discussed and highlighted for a long time and there was general agreement in decision making authorities that providing a right to work was the right thing to do, but as is often the case, making these decisions and changing policy is painfully slow.

It was also evident that not being allowed to work, while being subject to an institutional living arrangement (not unlike an open prison) for years at a time, (up to a decade for some), was the most significant social and psychological issue affecting Asylum Seekers and was therefore the issue of highest priority.

From an EU Report in 2017.....

This prohibition on work was placed on a legislative setting in Section 9 (4) of the [Refugee Act 1996](#) on the Irish government's position that access to the labour market would be a 'pull factor.' There has been no policy change on this issue since 1996 and in December 2016 the Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald, [in](#)



[response to a parliamentary question](#) reaffirmed this in stating that “*The key concern in this regard is that both the asylum process and the wider immigration system would be undermined by giving people who secure entry to the State, on foot of claims to asylum yet to be determined, the same access to employment as legal immigrants who follow the lawful route to employment.*” This contention remains even though [research](#) studies clearly show no long-term correlation between labour market access and destination choice for international protection applicants.

The adverse consequences of such a prohibition over a long period of time are clear. The Health Service Executive (HSE) has reported the harmful impact of denying employment on the mental health of people in the Irish reception system of Direct Provision

[<https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/> 2017]

On 2nd July 2018, the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive was transposed into Irish law. Ireland has now introduced new provisions to facilitate access to the labour market for eligible international protection applicants.

Social Enterprise Start-Up Phase

So, Roos was determined to establish a service to assist with supporting Asylum Seekers & Refugees into gainful employment. The option for self-employment for Roos was considered. Roos was eligible for Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, but having considered multiple governance options and pathways with the support of SICAP, it was evident that the best approach was to establish a social enterprise focusing on supporting the recruitment of refugees in the community.

It was also noted that very many of the asylum seekers were highly skilled in industries where there was a demand for skilled workers including engineering, medical care, finance and IT, but that the vast majority who had found work were not working in their profession or using their skills. It was also evident that asylum seekers and refugees had very specific needs which could only be provided by a specialist service (eg support in recognition of international qualifications / language / work placement and understanding of their challenges and background).

Some of the factors influencing the decision to establish a not for profit social enterprise, rather than a simpler commercial business was: - the nature of the target group, the potential opportunity for additional income, to win publicly funded commissions to provide social supports as an NGO that would not be available to a commercial business, and the ethos of the operation having an emphasis on caring for the vulnerable client and providing a holistic service in a way that would not be possible in a strictly commercial operation.

Acknowledging also that the recruitment industry is extremely competitive and even “cut-throat” in its nature, a private enterprise commercial approach would not have suited the modus operandi for Recruit Refugees Ireland.

Fortunately, as well as having expertise in assisting with establishing Social Enterprises, our SICAP development officer also had expertise in labour market activation approaches and techniques and so was able to add additional insight into the operation of the service as well as its governance and pathways towards establishment.

To establish the social enterprise, with the Support of the SICAP development officer, Roos prepared a business plan for the social enterprise.

A first stumbling block in establishing the social enterprise was the ineligibility of Roos in partaking in the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme. Roos was displaying and delivering all the traits and actions as any entrepreneur promoting any business in the economy but because the chosen route was a Social Enterprise model, there was no opportunity to avail of the BTWEA scheme.

This scheme over the years has proven to be a fantastic scheme which has facilitated many unemployed individuals (usually without availability of significant private investment resources), to pursue their dreams and embark on a new journey in the economy. The safety net of BTWEA effectively provides and 2 year window of opportunity to deliver on the business while keeping bread on the table through social protection supports. But governance requirements for a social enterprise requires a separation of the decision makers and the employees and therefore rules out the scheme as a potential gateway for the social entrepreneur. This policy should be changed and social entrepreneurs should be eligible to avail of the BTWEA scheme.

A second stumbling block was the requirement to have a licence to operate as a recruitment consultant in Ireland. This licence costs €500 but the project had no income to fulfil this cost. SICAP programme was not in a position to assist with this hurdle: - Programme Guidelines Section = Section 8 Financial Requirements:

Grants cannot be used to fund the following types of activities:

- Funding for on-going running costs incurred by LCGs for example rent, insurance, electricity, phone costs and office maintenance.

Seeking Resources

To overcome this barrier, Recruit Refugees Ireland [RRI] (with support from SICAP) completed a series of funding applications (over a period of 2 years) to a variety of sources to assist with start-up phase of the project. These included:



- Social Entrepreneurs Ireland
- Rethink Ireland
- Dept Justice Funding
- Cork County Council
- EU CEB Central European Bank Social Cohesion Fund
- SSNO

The project was new and without a track record and so found it difficult to reach the required standard despite the merits of the project. A constant experience of the project in dealing with state authorities has been great plaudits and appreciation but no resources or support of substance.

This was a real challenge at the start-up phase. The project was not allowed to generate any income without a licence. The project was not successful in winning grant aid award from multiple applications. The SICAP programme was not allowed to support these specific costs needed.

These challenges dramatically slowed down the growth of the project in the early years and took away some of the momentum.

On the plus side, this slow process did allow time for company formation, strategic planning work, and building of networks, board member recruitment and induction.

SICAP assisted financial costs associated with Board Formation / strategy and marketing. Through the networks of asylum seekers and refugees organisations which Roos was taking an active part and given the universal agreement that the project was necessary, had great merits and was being run by the right person, it was not too difficult to recruit an excellent board of directors to lead the project.



Finalisation of Governance Structure.

As project development evolved, the next step was to formally incorporate the social enterprise into a legal entity.

International Community Dynamics CLG was incorporated in September 2020.

The Internal Community Dynamics (ICD) CLG brought together a legal structure to govern 3 distinct projects all which had been established by Roos and her team.

We have already described the Citadel Music project and the Recruit Refugees Social Enterprise. ICD also provided oversight and support for KRAC11, a cricket team based out of Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre.

Board Members of ICD are:

Pierrot Ngadi, (ChairPerson). Pierrot Ngadi was born and grew up in Bandundu Province and Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is well known as a lobbyist and campaigner for the Congo and the Congolese diaspora.



Tolerance Mlambo, (Treasurer). Mr. Mlambo is a Certified Public Accountant in Ireland. He has a passion for helping charities and individuals to manage and grow their financial well-being.

Maria Minguella, (Secretary), Maria has a strong and long professional background in social inclusion policy development and research within the local government context in Ireland.

Nadia Mousseid, (Director), Nadia Mousseid is a Youth and Community Worker with a BSc in Youth and Community Work from the School of Applied Social Sciences in UCC

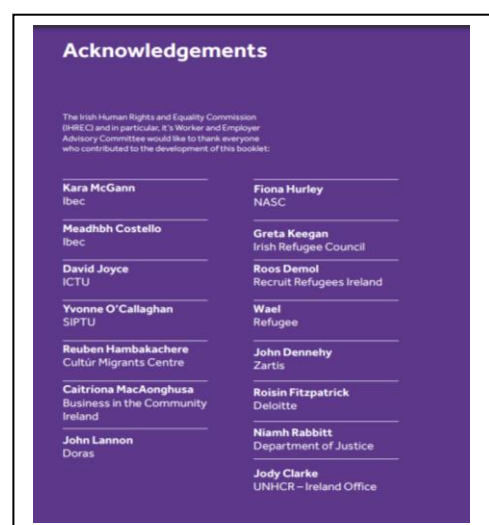
Norbert Nkengurutse. (Founder And Director), Norbert is an electro-mechanic engineer from Burundi, East-Africa. He worked as a producer for Christian radio, Ijwi ry'Amahoro.

Albert Hakizimana, (Co-Founder And Director), Albert moved to Dublin, Ireland from Bujumbura in Burundi in December 2007. He studied Economics and Finance and attended Kimmage Development Studies Centre in Dublin, where he studied International Development.

SICAP provided support for a number of Think-ins and Board gatherings which allowed for finalisation of company strategy and governance approaches. On an ongoing basis, SICAP mentorship and guidance was provided as project evolved, primarily with Roos but also with voluntary directors.

Tus

Having failed to achieve Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and without any success in winning core funding for ICD, with SICAP support Roos applied to be a participant on the TUS scheme with West Cork



Development Partnership and placed with International Community Dynamics.

Roos commenced her TUS placement on January 2021. This also put Roos in contact with WCDP TUS supervisor who was also in a position to support her in her role with ICD. Achieving a placement on the TUS scheme allowed Roos to fully concentrate her energies on the development of Recruit Refugees Ireland, while at the same time earning some income.

Due to Covid, the period of time on TUS has been extended and Roos is due to finish in April 2023. This resource and flexibility has been a great benefit to Roos and RRI.

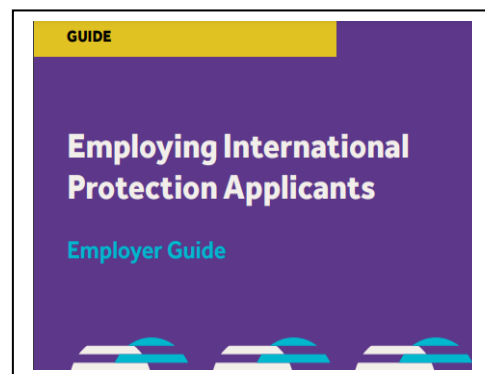
COVID

When Covid started, everything went online but direct provision residents had no laptops or income to purchase them.

So Roos commenced a campaign called “Windows for Opportunities” for donation of funding or laptops for residents in direct provision. €ICD successes in distributing 200 laptops in direct provision centres across Ireland and also fundraised and distributed €40,000 euros. All 200 lap-tops were checked individually by a volunteer in Galway.

The project also collected and distributed instruments including 30 guitars / keyboards / guitars and other instruments. The team also deployed multiple volunteers to teach musical instruments in direct provision throughout Ireland.

Citadel performed at Electric Picnic in 2022 / Cork Opera House and will attend Galway Capital of Culture (postponed Event) in November 2022.



Building the team with more volunteers around Ireland.

Counterintuitively, Covid benefited RRI. Covid moved everything on-line which meant the project grew much faster than planned and reached all corners of Ireland which had not been the original plan but enabled by digital online presence and service. The arrival of an on-line economy where business can be conducted on-line to all corners of the country (and the world) meant that one of Recruit Refugees tactical disadvantages (Being based out of Kilbritten at the time), was nullified and eliminated overnight.



In the years 2020 and 2021 (as Covid struck and dramatically altered our economy and society), The Recruit Refugees Ireland, project concept received plaudits and encouragement from all quarters. Roos was regularly consulted by policy makers, contributed to media, but there was very little money or income for the project.

For example, Roos was heavily involved in preparing the publication for IHREC guide for employing International protection applicants. Roos spoke at a variety of conferences and webinars including IBEC network, IREC annual conference and “tech for good” conference / men’s sheds. All of this was Pro Bono and achieved a great deal for the cause but did not improve the viability of RRI or provide Roos with a warranted remuneration which matched her skills, knowledge, expertise and hard work. However at the same time Roos and the board recognised the importance of these activities for the positioning and network of RRI which was a crucial element. (Particularly building relationships with employers).

Growth Phase and Increasing Demand

As Recruit Refugees Ireland expanded in the Covid years, Team members have been recruited around Ireland and currently there are 10 volunteers working on the project, 1 as an IT specialist and 9 as job coaches. 4 of these individuals live in direct provision and all the others are migrants themselves. RRI currently covers 14 languages in its support.

The team are based in Galway / Waterford / Dublin / Cork and Tullamore.

RRI provides workshops for developing CV’s in English / French / Arabic / Swahili and various Somali languages / dialects. These are delivered on-line.

Success came in 2021 with a Rethink Ireland grant aid of €9,000 and participation in the strategic accelerator programme which as helped with strategic planning and development for the business.

After a decrease during Covid, there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers seeking International Protection in Ireland with over 7,000 in 2022 up to July. (Projected to be more that 13,000 in the year 2022.)



This is a reflection of Brexit, UK Rwanda policy and a large number of conflicts, environmental catastrophes and challenges in the world. In the meantime, Ireland is in the midst of a housing crisis, so persons with a right to remain in Ireland are not in a position to leave the direct provision system as there is nowhere to go to.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has introduced an additional 55,000 with the EU Temporary Protection Directive. Dublin is a particular challenge where a large number of hotels are hosting international protection applications with very limited support being provided.



RRI has become involved in communications and support services for those individuals. This is a huge piece of work. Much of the energies and resources of NGO's have been diverted towards Ukrainian services and this has further reduced supports available to International Protection Applicants. (Whose needs remain relatively hidden with the scale and impact of the Ukrainian crisis).

Over time, Roos has developed a deep relationship with multiple large employers including Musgraves. Some employers visited a direct provision centre to fully understand the issues. These visits have proved very beneficial. The project has received commissions and income from many employers and some donations from benefactors. These have covered the expenses associated with operations, but

RRI has placed many people in the higher qualification jobs where it is relatively easier, but the lower level jobs can run into difficulties. What happens afterwards, can sometimes run into difficulty. For a variety of reasons various employment placements do not work out, often due to cultural misunderstandings. Almost every CV received into RRI is very poor so a lot of work is needed with each candidate to bring their CV into Irish norms before any prospect of placement can be considered. This is very labour intensive.

RRI has also identified a need for intercultural dialogue training courses with employers (eg issuing of instructions / understanding Trauma – being Trauma informed). This type of support should be provided to supervisors as well as HR and foremen in direct contact with the employee. This education and training need is a 2 way process. Asylums seekers and Refugees also need to learn Irish work practices. (eg how to call in sick / expectations in employment) and other behaviours. So, investment is required for both parties, but this must be funded from somewhere.

Department of integration core funding application is pending as we speak and will deliver core funding for the service to work with Refugees throughout Ireland initially for 3 years. The purpose of this funding will be to fund information office and hubs for individuals.

Conclusion

As we conclude our case study in October 2022, Recruit Refugees Ireland continues to battle away against the tide and against the wind, receiving little or no support from Irish state despite delivering a phenomenal impact for those it serves with its limited resources, but also missing out on a potential to dramatically increase this impact on the ground.

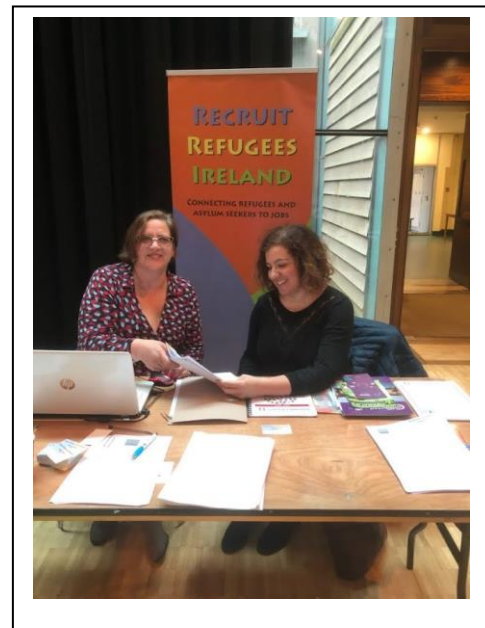
In October Roos will be attend the 7th EU migration forum in Brussels focused on the integration of young asylum seekers through employment. Roos is being funded by EU to attend this event.

Roos continues to evolve her role as an advocate and representative. She is on the board of Africa Solidarity centre, Ambassador for Ghana Community in Ireland and Chairperson of European Network of Refugee Organisations. She has also announced here candidature to be a member of EU Council of Migration Forum representing Ireland. This decision is pending.

RRI was contacted by UNESCO to deliver a workshop on employability for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. This will shortly be delivered in Dublin. They have also asked RRI to quote for the provision of a 1-2-1 guidance service and this is being considered.

After 3 years of very hard work with almost no support and very little income, the project is finally turning a corner and on the cusp of receiving income and funding to support its work.

Roos suggested that the new artists scheme where artists are supported with a core income stream to help fund their artistic endeavours and lifestyle could be extended to social entrepreneurs where it would deliver a very high social return on investment.



It has been a phenomenal journey for Roos. The project commenced to achieve an income for Roos and at time of writing this is still not achieved. Roos has come close to burn-out on a number of occasions, her workload needs to be managed and she needs to be supported.



All along the journey the SICAP programme has walked this journey with Roos and Recruit Refugees Ireland. SICAP team members have provided a listening ear, mentorship, friendship, many coffee's, phone-calls, emails and texts. It has been a pleasure and honour to have had the opportunity to share this journey with Roos and the directors of ICD.

The original social enterprise recruitment consultancy has evolved into a much more holistic support service with elements of employment but also looking at all needs and integration.

Observation on Social Enterprise Model

A final observation from the SICAP perspective is the on-going battle all social enterprises undertake to justify their existence. In reality, social enterprises wish to deliver social and community supports in an area where there has been an evident market failure and subsequently a gap in services. If the neo-liberal market was functioning effectively, there would be no need for the service in the first instance. So, almost by definition social enterprises will need some state subvention in order to deliver the service they wish to achieve.

But the state apparatus insists that everything is delivered by a neo-liberal model where the only thing that is valued is money and commercial transactions, but “public good services” like empathy, care, support and empowerment have no value and are not valued.

We have seen multiple very effective social enterprises being effectively shut down by a dogmatic unwavering devotion to neo-liberal market economic factors as the only factor that matters in any contract for services. We see this process in action in 2022 where Local Employment Services with almost 30 years of experience are effectively forced into a market driven private industry model where all the ethos / values / empathy and voluntarism mean nothing. We have seen the exact same process happen in the Home Retrofitting industry where a nationwide network of effective and functioning NGO's were shut down just at the time when they were most needed. This process is also currently happening in the delivery of rural transport as we prepare this case study.

These approaches hound and cajole other social enterprises into becoming fully commercial operations if they are to exist at all – and in doing so lose all that is valuable in that model. Most recently these policies have imposed such a risk burden on the voluntary boards of directors that continuing in the industry is impossible. This slavish adherence to market forces has given us a greatly damaged environment, a failing housing market, greater inequality in society and a pretty shallow view of what matters in our world as we pass it onto the next generation.

Essentially the model which drives procurement of public good services and decision making at state and EU level does not recognise the value and purpose of a “3rd sector” in the economy / society. In this model, everything that happens is either public service – or it is private sector. The usual excuse / explanation is EU procurement rules. If this is the case, they need to be fixed – that is for sure.

But it seems it is possible to design legislative solutions. When was the last time that the services of a voluntary hospital or board of management for a primary school was put out the tender? Answer: They don't have to. So our institutional public arrangements are capable of procuring services from 3rd party independent bodies to deliver public good services in the community when it suits the national political agenda or tradition. This approach needs to be transferred to the delivery of public goods through social enterprises.

At macro policy level, there needs to be serious recognition that that sometimes there are things that matter more than just Dollars and Euros. The principles and ethos that drives an NGO has real value and needs to be recognised and supported. Following such a recognition, then some real policy changes on how services which deliver a public goods can be encouraged and supported to deliver these goods without being forced to become market driven enterprises and in doing so lose all that is valuable in that model.