



**UCD GEARY INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY
DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES**

**Policy and Political Responses to Ireland's
Refugee Crisis**

Bryan Fanning, Professor of Migration and Social Policy, University College
Dublin

Geary WP2024/05
October 3, 2024

UCD Geary Institute Discussion Papers often represent preliminary work and are circulated to encourage discussion. Citation of such a paper should account for its provisional character. A revised version may be available directly from the author.

Any opinions expressed here are those of the author(s) and not those of UCD Geary Institute. Research published in this series may include views on policy, but the institute itself takes no institutional policy positions.

Policy and Political Responses to Ireland's Refugee Crisis

Bryan Fanning, Professor of Migration and Social Policy, University College Dublin

Key words: Asylum seekers, community engagement, far-right, politics, hostile environments, International protection applicants, localism, protests, refugees, social cohesion, state capacity, Ukrainians

Abstract

Responses to refugees and international protection applicants in the Republic of Ireland have, in recent years, mostly been reactive attempts at crisis management. Since the invasion of the Ukraine by Russia in 2022, Ireland has admitted exponentially larger numbers of refugees than previously (under the European Temporary Protection Directive) alongside hugely increased numbers of asylum seekers (International Protection applicants). In the absence of state capacity to provide adequate accommodation for the increased number of refugees and asylum seekers and to provide supports for host communities, this has led to an ongoing wave of anti-refugee protests and anti-social behaviour promoted and exploited by far-right groups in both deprived urban areas and in rural areas. The focus of this paper is on a number of interconnected challenges. There is a need to develop services, accommodation and infrastructure to meet the needs of future projected arrivals, as well as those who have arrived in recent years. There is also a need to proactively address anxieties within host communities by improving engagement with and supports to these communities. Zero-sum

perceptions that host communities suffer from the arrival of refugees need to be addressed. This cannot be done without a wider social policy focus on social cohesion, community development and the strategic development of State capacity to provide proactive supports to host communities.

Introduction

The focus of this paper is on specific policy, infrastructure and state capacity challenges arising from the arrival of large numbers of refugees and International Protection (IP) applicants (aka ‘asylum seekers’): the need to shift from ad-hoc or crisis management responses; the need develop accommodation, services and supports to meet the needs of asylum seekers and the communities in which these are located, and the need to plan for the ongoing arrival of large numbers of IP applicants. Significant state capacity deficits needed to be addressed. In Ireland, as elsewhere, political debates on refugees have focused considerably on security policies that promise to reduce refugee numbers whether through border controls or faster processing of asylum claims. However, events such as the November 2023 Dublin riots and protests in a number of urban and rural areas against the siting of accommodation for IP applicants suggest that refugee policy should not be developed in isolation from other areas of social policy or without consideration of the implications for social cohesion.

Since 2000, when a system known as ‘direct provision’ was introduced, responses to the needs of asylum seekers have often been deliberately siloed way from other areas of social policy; responsibility for accommodating and supporting these was given to the Department of Justice rather than a government department with responsibility for social policy. This was formally changed after the 2020 election when the programme for government included a commitment to end direct provision and the transfer of responsibilities to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). The reform of direct provision was sidelined by increases in the number of IP applicants and an even larger influx of Ukrainian refugees. Between 2005 and 2022 IPAS (International Protection

Accommodation Services) provided accommodation for around 7,000 asylum seekers at any given time but this number had risen to around 22,000 in 2022 and had reached 31,375 by June 2024.¹ This rise occurred alongside a far larger influx of Ukrainian Refugees – some 107,000 by June 2024, although some of these have left the country. While the overall number of Ukrainians has fallen, it is realistic to anticipate that Ireland will continue to receive large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.

Until very recently, Ireland has appeared to be an outlier compared to other European countries where immigration has been a political issue and where political parties opposed to immigration have achieved considerable electoral success. However, the apparent inability of the State to manage rising numbers of asylum seekers, in addition to Ukrainian refugees who have arrived since 2022, has resulted in immigration becoming a high-profile political issue.

For the most part, the State has relied on rented accommodation such as hotels and on adapting various kinds of buildings for use as accommodation of IP applicants. Opposition to the latter has become the focus of protests that have often involved far-right groups as well as local demonstrators, and some of these conflicts have resulted in public order incidents and damage to buildings by arson. There has been sustained protests in a number of places throughout 2023 and 2024 including within deprived urban areas such as the East Wall and Coolock in Dublin, and in small towns such as Roscrea and Newtownmountkennedy where objectors argued that the accommodation of refugees would place an unacceptable burden on community services or deprive locals of facilities such as a hotel used for social events. Far-right groups have sought to manipulate such

¹ Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *International Protection Accommodation and Arrival Statistics 07 July 2024*, www.gov.ie accessed 13 August 2024

protests and have used social media footage of these to promote racism and opposition to immigration.

The November 2023 Dublin riot was interpreted as a watershed moment. It followed a wave of protests against the accommodation of asylum seekers in some urban neighbourhoods and rural areas. The problem for the government was how to accommodate hugely increasing numbers of asylum seekers in addition to supporting more than 100,000 recently-arrived Ukrainian refugees whilst the country was experiencing a housing crisis that affected large numbers of Irish citizens. Little or no strategic infrastructure, such as purpose-built or state managed refugee centres was available. Communication with and outreach to host communities by government departments has been consistently poor. The state responded to the refugee crisis mostly through transfer payments which had tied up a considerable portion of hotel space and rental-sector accommodation in the country. The apparent absence of proactive measures or plans to promote integration and social cohesion beyond the implicit expectation that the voluntary sector will step up to help integrate newcomers has contributed to the politicisation of the immigration.

Various statements by Government Ministers and policies published by the IPAS, the State agency responsible for refugee and asylum seeker accommodation and integration, suggest a direction of travel rather than a decisive strategic response to challenges arising from the huge increases in refugees and asylum seekers. A key problem has been an inability of the State to demonstrate that it can support host communities, whether through clear communications, well-publicised policies aimed at promoting the integration of refugees and asylum seekers and the decisive targeting of supports aimed at shoring up social cohesion. The current technocratic civil service-led approach appears to be very poor at engaging with host communities on the ground or at supporting the kinds of community-based coalitions that can provide leadership at a local level.

A lack of confidence in State capacity to support those placed in IPAS accommodation and wider host communities has contributed to zero-sum perceptions that refugees and asylum seekers are ‘dumped’ on host communities with inadequate supports. Perceptions that host communities will lose out because of competition for services need to be challenged on the ground. State responses to refugees and asylum seekers appear to be siloed or detached from wider debates about the needs of communities. There is a need for a strategic focus on social cohesion which addresses the accommodation needs of refugees and asylum seekers as part of a holistic approach to the needs of communities. However, there can be considerable political challenges in integrating responses to refugees into mainstream social policy.

Since the introduction of ‘direct provision’ in 2000 until the decision made in 2021 (since put on hold) to reform this system, there has been little emphasis on integrating asylum seekers into host communities. Direct provision was deliberately designed to provide less supports than for people within similar systems who were citizens. It was a political response aimed at reducing the numbers coming to Ireland by creating a hostile environment for these rather than a social policy designed to support these and the communities within which they were placed. Such performative hostility may have contributed to impressions that the arrival of asylum seekers imposes burdens on host communities.

Opponents of immigration tend to claim that migrants exploit welfare systems that were designed for citizens, particularly so in the case of international protection applicants who are not initially allowed to work. Claims that migrants are drawn by generous welfare systems, employment opportunities that put them in competition with citizens, and perceptions of zero-sum conflicts between citizens and migrants for housing, health care, and other public services can be an impetus

for welfare chauvinism.² Demands for chauvinism or discrimination in favour of citizens in response to immigration are particularly likely when it is believed that the provision of services to non-citizens comes at a cost to citizens. For example, opponents of immigration might claim that it has become harder for citizens to obtain housing or health care because of immigration.

Welfare chauvinism seems to be most-intensely directed at unwanted migrants: those with irregular residency status; those who arrive as asylum seekers who would not otherwise be entitled to work visas or legal migration and those envisaged as temporary guest workers. The migration of asylum seekers - those independently claiming refugee status - has become highly politicised in many of the world's richer countries that have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Refugees. Having surrendered a degree of sovereignty, these countries are required to admit all those claiming asylum. Admitting asylum seekers in accordance with obligations under the UN Convention places administrative and infrastructure burdens on host states that are not incurred when migrants are expected make their own way, organise their own accommodation, and support themselves economically. It appears to be politically easier to admit migrants when these are perceived as economic contributors than when these are perceived as a burden on welfare states.

Yet, it has been argued that such conflicts are less likely when infrastructure and services are trusted as capable. Welfare chauvinism is easier to stoke in situations where there are worries about the ability of welfare states to meet the needs of citizens. Zero-sum perceptions of the consequences of extending welfare entitlements to migrants are less likely when there is confidence amongst citizens

² Frida Boräng, *National Institutions-International Migration: Labour Markets, Welfare States, Immigration Policy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), p.44

in the capacity of welfare systems and infrastructure to meet everyone's needs.³ Freda Boräng, whose research is drawn on here, contends that welfare nepotism is less likely in well-resourced welfare states than in weak ones where zero-sum competition for more limited provision is more likely. She maintains that welfare chauvinism is far from inevitable where the legitimacy of welfare systems and social policy is rooted in beliefs and values that view public services and safety nets as good for society, good for social cohesion and as part of the social contract. However, zero-sum perceptions of the capacity of welfare infrastructure and services to address the needs of both citizens and migrants can be difficult to overcome when there is a lack of confidence in the ability of the state to meet the needs of citizens in areas such as housing and health care.⁴

Historical Contexts and Legacies of Policy Failure

Ireland has experienced more than a quarter century of immigration since the late 1990s when one aspect of this – the arrival of asylum seekers numbers in growing numbers - became politicised without any corresponding politicisation of labour migration. With the exception of a Referendum on Citizenship in 2004, until recently immigration has rarely become a political issue. Much of Ireland's immigration policy is implicit or has played out below the radar: Irish economic growth, the services sector and health care provision has depended significantly on migrant workers; the free movement of migrants from all EU member states was introduced in 2004 without any of the subsequent political controversy that resulted in Brexit in the United Kingdom.

³ Frida Boräng 'Large-scale solidarity? Effects of welfare state institutions on the admission of forced migrants', *European journal of political research* 54.2 (2015), pp.216-217

⁴Boräng 'Large-scale solidarity?', p.222

Most immigration to Ireland has been un-controversial despite this occurring at levels greater than most other EU-countries or in the UK where this contributed to the growth of anti-immigrant political parties within mainstream politics. In Ireland, there has been little focus on migrant integration policies within political debates beyond the introduction of citizenship ceremonies in 2011. Some integration policy documents refer to EU Common Basic Principles of Integration but these have not articulated specific policies or approaches to integrating migrants beyond reliance on labour markets and bottom-up voluntary sector initiatives within communities.

It is important to emphasise that Irish refugee policy dates back almost 70 years to 1956 when, soon after Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Refugees, it admitted a single cohort of some 561 'programme refugees' who had fled to Austria following the Russian invasion that year. The total number of programme refugees admitted in the forty years following Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention in 1956 was less than one and a half thousand. Some Chilian programme refugees were admitted in 1973 and 1974. In 1979, the Irish government agreed to accept 212 Vietnamese refugees.⁵

In 1991, a Refugee Agency was established and funded by the government to co-ordinate the admission, reception and resettlement of refugees. The Refugee Agency drew upon past experiences of responding to Bosnian programme refugees in designing supports for Kosovar refugees who were admitted on terms very similar to Ukrainians admitted under the Temporary Protection Directive. The Refugee Agency ran a regional reception programme. Agency officials visited host communities in Waterford, Millstreet and Tralee in advance to pave the way for the refugees. They co-ordinated the efforts of local groups, schools and health

⁵ C. O' Regan, *Report of a Survey of the Vietnamese and Bosnian Refugee Communities in Ireland* (Dublin: Refugee Agency, 1998), p123. S. Bradley, *From Bosnia to Ireland's Private Sector*, (Dublin: Clann Housing Association, 1999) p.26.

boards to plan for the successful reception of refugees accommodated in these towns.⁶

The Refugee Agency was shut down as part of a political response to a perceived refugee crisis in 1999 when 'asylum seekers' (a term used to refer to those who make individual applications for protection) began to arrive independently of UN-host country agreements in growing numbers.⁷ Experience in how best to respond to refugees had developed over time. However, many good practices were abandoned in 1999 when the political response to a perceived crisis (the arrival of 7,724 asylum seekers that year) led to significant changes.

Responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers was shifted from government departments with expertise in social policy to the Department of Justice, which was also responsible for policing, the prison system, and border security. Simply put, responsibility for the welfare of refugees and asylum seekers was given to securocrats rather than government departments responsible for social policy.⁸ Political and policy responses to asylum seekers prioritised border controls and security governance above measures aimed at promoting social inclusion or integration.

From April 2000, asylum seekers arriving in Ireland were no longer entitled to supplementary assistance and rent allowances. Existing welfare entitlements were replaced by a system of 'direct provision' that limited support for asylum seekers

⁶ Bryan Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester University Press, 2012), pp.94-95

⁷ Numbers of asylum seekers who arrived independently rose from a very low base during the 1990s. Numbers per annum peaked in 2002 at 11,634 and thereafter declined year on year to just 2,689 in 2009.

⁸ Bryan Fanning, *Immigration and Social Cohesion in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp.43-45

to basic accommodation, meals and cash allowances that were considerably below benefit levels for indigenous welfare recipients in emergency accommodation. The system most closely resembled a welfare scheme for hospitalised welfare recipients. As put by a trade union representative of community welfare officers, the rates were just about enough to 'buy a bottle of Lucozade and a few biscuits'.⁹

According to its critics 'direct provision' was designed to be deliberately harsh in order to discourage asylum seekers from coming to Ireland; it deliberately impeded the integration of asylum seekers. Various studies have highlighted how direct provision resulted in extreme poverty and marginalisation. For example, Irish Research Council research published in 2001 found that asylum seeker children living in direct provision experienced extreme material deprivation.¹⁰ They lived in households below the 20 percent poverty line.¹¹ The numbers of asylum seeker arrivals peaked in 2002 at 11,634 and subsequently declined but the direct provision system remained in place.¹² Once a state-fostered system of deliberately marginalising asylum seekers had become routinised, the asylum problem was deemed to have been solved by the Irish political system. The focus of the Department of Justice, through its reception and Integration Agency (RIA),

⁹Vice-chair of the Eastern Health Board branch of IMPACT. *Irish Times* (27 May 2000).

¹⁰ The study found that an overwhelming majority of respondents on direct provision (92 percent) stated that they considered it necessary to buy extra food to supplement the food provided in the hostels for themselves and their children. However, most (69 percent) stated that they were unable to afford to purchase extra food. The report argued that the welfare discriminations experienced by asylum seeker children on 'direct provision' were unambiguously contrary to Ireland's obligations under the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1992). B. Fanning, A. Veale, and D. O'Connor, *Beyond the Pale: Asylum Seeking Children and Social Exclusion in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Refugee Council, 2001).

¹¹ Bryan Fanning and Angela Veale, "Child poverty as public policy: direct provision and asylum seeker children in the Republic of Ireland." *Child Care in Practice* 10.3 (2004): 241-251.

¹²Government of Ireland, Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process (Sept 2020) www.ie, p.19

the predecessor of IPAS, was upon the more effective management of this system rather than upon change or reform. NGOs such as the Irish Refugee Council, for their part, continued to criticise ‘direct provision’ but also focused on improving the management of the system in the absence of any political opportunities to achieve this.

Criticisms of the shortcomings of direct provision gained ground over time. Concerns expressed by NGOs working with asylum seekers were acknowledged within official reports which made recommendations for reform. In December 2019, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality called for a move away from accommodating applicants in institutionalised settings.¹³ In September 2020, the government published the *Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process*. The Advisory Group, chaired by Catherine Day, former Secretary General of the European Commission, was established to advise government on the development of a long-term approach to the provision of supports including accommodation to persons in the international protection process based on best practice in EU countries, and to set out a procession of replacing direct provision with a new system.

The Day Report described the direct provision system as a response to an emergency that had since passed. It stated that direct provision was introduced partly: ‘to respond to fears at the time that access to Irish levels of social welfare and other supports would constitute a “pull” factor in attracting economic migrants’.¹⁴ The Advisory Group accepted many criticisms of direct provision by

¹³ Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, Report on Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process, December 2019.

¹⁴ Cited from *Report of the Advisory Group*, p 19. Figures do not include those who have withdrawn their international protection cases, having been granted a residence permission on immigration grounds such as being a family member of an Irish/EU citizen.

many civil society organisations (CSOs), such as the Irish Refugee Council, the Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI), the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Nasc, Dorás Luimní, and the Children’s Rights Alliance, as well as international bodies such as the UNHCR. It noted that, by 2021, the available stock of accommodation consisted of seven state and thirty seven privately-run centres. Some of these were located in urban areas with good access to transport, health care, educational and employment services. Others were in remote locations and suffer from poor services links such as transport and telecommunications. The system was described as operating at full capacity and having to rely on procuring additional emergency accommodation to accommodate new applicants.¹⁵ Even though the system had not faced emergency levels of demand for many years, it overcrowded asylum seekers into former hotels and hostels that were not fit for purpose:

Most of these accommodation centres were originally built for other purposes and are not suitable for long stay accommodation. In some centres, accommodation is dormitory style with no cooking facilities or private spaces. This situation is exacerbated in the emergency centres. In some centres, families of up to 5 people are sharing the same room and in most cases the staff has not been trained to deal with the needs of residents and particularly those suffering from traumatic experiences.¹⁶

The Day Report recommended that the new system should be equipped with the capacity to process and accommodate around 3,500 new applicants for international protection annually in State-owned reception centres and it envisaged a complete implementation no later than mid-2023. In February 2021, based in part on recommendations of the Advisory Group, the government issued

¹⁵ *Report of the Advisory Group*, p.20

¹⁶ *Report of the Advisory Group*, p.19

its *White Paper on Ending Direct Provision*.¹⁷ However, the ‘permanent, sustainable and agile system’ envisaged in the Day Report and the White Paper radically underestimated levels of demand since 2022 and projected future needs for accommodation and services.¹⁸

The asylum seeker accommodation programme existed alongside a Refugee Protection Programme run by the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) within the Department of Justice and Equality. In 2015, in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, Ireland committed to taking in just 4,000 refugees in total over several years with an initial pledge to admit another 1,040 over an unspecified timeframe. Specifically, Ireland committed in 2015 to resettling 200 refugees from Syria and Iraq in 2015, a further 357 in 2016, 520 refugees in 2017, and 600 in 2018. These targets were slightly exceeded. By December 2019, a total of 1,913 resettlements were completed.¹⁹ In summary, both refugee and asylum seeker programmes were designed to deal with very small numbers.

Anatomy of a Refugee Crises

Post-2022 Responses to Ukrainian Refugees

Viewed alongside responses to programme refugees and asylum seekers since 1956, Ireland’s decision to directly admit tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees was unprecedented. In effect, these were to be treated as if they were EU member states’ citizens entitled to enter the state, reside in, and work in the Republic of

¹⁷ Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), *White Paper on Ending Direct Provision* (2023), gov.ie

¹⁸ *Report of the Advisory Group*, p.6

¹⁹ S. Arnold & E. Quinn, (2016), “Resettlement of Refugees and Private Sponsorship in Ireland”, *Economic and Social Research Institute Research Series Number 55*

Ireland without restrictions. Ukrainians admitted under the 2001 European Temporary Protection Directive (ratified by Ireland in 2015) became immediately entitled to means-tested income support. Immediately on arrival in the country, Ukrainian refugees were issued with a Personal Public Service (PPS) number which enabled them to access social welfare benefits and public services on the same basis as an Irish citizen. Ukrainians were exempted from having to establish habitual residency in Ireland before becoming entitled to benefits. Unlike asylum seekers and migrants who were not classed as habitual residents, they were entitled to receive monthly child benefit payments paid to the parents or guardians of children in full-time education. As such, Ukrainian refugees were granted many rights and benefits not given to others within Ireland's international protection system.²⁰ For example, at the beginning of May 2022, the government introduced 'emergency legislation' to ensure that Ukrainian parents would qualify for childcare payments including a universal subsidy on care for children up to 15 years of age and access to a means-tested scheme.²¹

In many places, Ukrainian refugees experienced a positive welcome. For example, some voluntary groups who sought to provide practical support to Ukrainians had previous experience of supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Media analysis highlighted high levels of goodwill towards and voluntary support within communities for Ukrainian refugees.²² For example, in a May 2022 account, the village of Ballon in County Carlow was described as rallying around more than 100 Ukrainian refugees who were given emergency accommodation, and who were

²⁰ Social Welfare Supports for Ukrainian Refugees, Accessed 13 October 2022 https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/ukrainian_refugees_in_ireland/social_welfare_supports_for_ukrainian_refugees.html

²¹ John Dowling, 'Emergency law will ensure that Ukrainian kids will qualify for care payments', *Irish Independent*, 2 May 2022

²² Paul Hyland, 'These practical acts of kindness are blowing my mind', *Irish Independent*, 22 April 2022

given practical support by community organisations and local businesses.²³ An article published on 31 October 2022 reported that there were more than 650 Ukrainians accommodated in Westport and that the number was expected to rise to 1,000 by the end of the year. 350 of these were accommodated in a hotel, the rest in guest houses, hostels and in family homes. A 'Westport Welcomes Ukraine' group organised donations of clothes, bicycles, and items needed by babies.²⁴

Yet challenges and difficulties were also reported, including a lack of easy communication between different agencies and that GP services were extremely stretched.²⁵ By November 2022, Killarney, a tourist town with a population of 10,360, hosted 3,200 refugees and asylum seekers. However, local councillors described how goodwill towards these had begun to wane because of pressure on local GP services and the loss of business in the town because most tourist accommodation was occupied by refugees.²⁶ Alongside such reports of the challenges faced by host communities, newspapers reported, with increased frequency, on opposition within some such communities to hosting more refugees. For example, on 30 October 2022 a Sinn Féin councillor was reported as describing on Facebook the town he represented, Ballaghadereen, as having reached the limit of refugees that it could accommodate: 'there is no work, doctors run off their feet,

²³ Geraldine Gittens, 'Village pulls together to welcome refugees', *The Irish Times*, 3 May 2022

²⁴ Áine Ryan, 'Tourist town struggles to cope with numbers and needs of war refugees', *Irish Times*, 31 October 2022

²⁵ Áine Ryan, 'Tourist town struggles to cope with numbers and needs of war refugees', *Irish Times*, 31 October 2022

²⁶ Anne Lucy, 'Killarney must decide if it is a tourist town or asylum town, council meeting told', *Irish Times* 4 November 2022

limited gardaí, and now I hear we are to get 135 extra refugees. God help them and God help us.’²⁷

Yet, zero-sum perceptions are not inevitable and do not exist in many areas of social policy. For example, since 2022, the education system has absorbed unprecedented numbers of refugee and asylum seeker children without political controversy. The speed at which schools took in Ukrainian refugees after February 2022 was striking. By July 2022, more than 350 Ukrainian pupils were able to complete the equivalent of Leaving Certificate exams that would enable them to continue into third-level education.²⁸ Access to state-funded summer schools aimed at vulnerable children from disadvantaged communities that run every July was extended to Ukrainian children. Additional funding was provided for these schemes to extend the focus on literacy and numeracy summer camps to include English-language education.²⁹ By November 2022, the number of Ukrainian children in Irish schools had risen to 12,444. At the time there was an estimated 25,000 spare places in primary schools and more than 15,000 places in post-primary schools.³⁰ By end of 2022 more than 13,000 Ukrainian children were enrolled in Irish schools. This was described as an integration ‘success story’ by the education editor of the Irish Times.³¹

²⁷ Maeve Sheehan, councillor calls town a ‘dumping ground for refugees’, *Sunday Independent*, 30 October 2022

²⁸ Katherine Donnelly, ‘Over 350 Ukrainian pupils to sit final school exams here’, *Irish Independent*, 22 July 2022

²⁹ Carl O’Brien, ‘Summer school’ plan to include Ukrainian pupils’, *Irish Times* 3 May 2022

³⁰ Katherine Donnelly, ‘Ukrainian pupils in Irish schools rise to 12,544’, *Irish Independent*, 3 November 2022

³¹ Carl O’Brien, ‘Integration of Ukrainian children a success story for Irish schools’, *Irish Times*, 2 January 2023

Pledges of accommodation by people willing to take Ukrainians into their homes far outstripped the ability of the Irish Red Cross to process these.³² By June 2022, some 9,000 offers of accommodation had been passed by the Irish Red Cross to the government but only a small number of these applications had been processed because of delays in organising Garda vetting.³³ Yet, by April 2024 around a quarter of all Ukrainians in State-sponsored accommodation were living either with host families or in empty houses or homes pledged by members of the public.³⁴ By September 2024, some 16,000 households hosting Ukrainians were in receipt of State payments of Euro 800 per month.³⁵

However, with a few months of the arrival of large numbers of Ukrainians, officials were reported as warning about potential social unrest because of a lack of state capacity to provide emergency accommodation for the numbers that were expected to continue to arrive in Ireland. The Sunday Independent reported in May 2022 that a memo to Cabinet ‘bluntly’ identified what were described as ‘downstream effects on local population, and in particular in deprived communities that ‘creates risks for social cohesion and integration.’ The briefing to the Cabinet advised that that the policy of admitting Ukrainians on an ongoing basis was unsustainable and posed a potential risk to some public services that were already unable to meet levels of demand. The Cabinet was advised of a looming refugee accommodation crisis. Most of those accommodated by the State had been placed in hotels using six month contracts that were coming to an end at the beginning of the tourism season. It was reported that a scheme to provide

³² Rebecca O’Connor, ‘From Ukraine to here’, *Irish Times*, 30 April 2022

³³ Maeve Sheehan, ‘Ukrainian accommodation crisis to become complex’, *Sunday Independent*, 12 June 2022

³⁴ Ailbhe Connelly, ‘Red Cross renews appeal to public on housing Ukrainian refugees’, www.rte.ie 19 April 2024

³⁵ Kitty Holland, ‘More than 16,000 now hosting Ukrainians’, *Irish Times*, 27 September 2024

payments to private households that took in Ukrainian refugees was up and running but that such accommodation accounted for only a small fraction of what was required.³⁶

By July 2022, more than 40,000 Ukrainian refugees had arrived and the weekly rate of arrivals had exceeded 1,400, along with 6,480 asylum seekers (almost 400 per week).³⁷ Due to accommodation shortages, it was announced that some newly-arrived Ukrainians would be temporarily accommodated in tents at the Gormanstown army camp in County Meath whilst plans for several other tented sites were soon after announced.³⁸ Ukrainians and international protection applicants were processed in a hotel in Citywest on the outskirts of Dublin that had previously been used to as a Covid quarantine centre for people who had just arrived in the country during the pandemic. By July 2022, Citywest was severely overcrowded and an additional makeshift processing centre was set up in Dublin airport where many newly-arrived refugees and asylum seekers 'slept on the floor'.³⁹

By December 2022, the number of Ukrainian arrivals had risen to 67,448. A further 11,634 international protection applicants had arrived in 2022.⁴⁰ By then some 50,000 medical cards had been issued to Ukrainians. By November 2023, a total of

³⁶ Hugh O'Donnell, 'Cabinet secret memo wars of social unrest over refugees', *Sunday Independent*, 22 May 2022

³⁷ Shauna Bowers and Polina Maliuzhonok, 'Number of non-Ukrainians seeking refugee in Ireland almost triples', *Irish Independent*, 15 July 2022

³⁸ Amy Molly and Phillip Ryan, 'Houses left empty while Ukrainians are forced to sleep in tents', *Irish Independent*, July 14 2022; Jack Power and Cormac McQuinn, 'Plans for three more tented sites for Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers', *Irish Independent*, 18 July 2022

³⁹ Allison Bray, 'Refugees forced to sleep on floor at makeshift reception centre at airport', *Irish Independent*, 15 July 2022

⁴⁰ Harry McGee 'Record number sought asylum in Ireland last year' *Irish Times*, 3 January 2023

94,000 Ukrainians had by then arrived since the Russian invasion but an estimated 16% of these had left the country. A total of 20,808 were employed whilst 22,604 were in education. By March 2024, the number of Ukrainian refugees leaving the state had begun to exceed new arrivals.⁴¹ By March 2024, the number of refugees and asylum seekers accommodated by the state had fallen from a peak of around 60,000 (in November 2022) to some 50,000, most in private sector commercial accommodation.⁴²

More than 107,000 PPSN (Personal Public Service Numbers) were issued to Ukrainians between March 2022 and June 2024. Three quarters of these had activity linked to their PPSNs including access to benefits, education, social welfare, and taxable employment. The others had presumably left the country. Of those Ukrainians who came to Ireland, some 46% were women over 20 years of age, 20% were men over 20 years, and 30% were under 20 years. Some 44,214 had been interviewed by INTREO (the Irish Public Employment Service). Of these, more than half (58%) had some degree of English language proficiency.⁴³

In October 2022 the government launched a social media campaign aimed at discouraging Ukrainians from coming to Ireland that highlighted difficulties in obtaining accommodation.⁴⁴ The Temporary Protection Directive would remain in operation but plans were drawn up to require Ukrainians supported by the state to pay for food and other ancillary services and that a means-test criteria would

⁴¹ Sorcha Pollak, 'Ukrainian refugee arrivals fall 65% since December', *Irish Times*, 29 March 2024

⁴² Gabija Gataveckaite, 'Private accommodation for refugees costing twice as much as state housing', *Irish Independent*, 19 April 2024

⁴³ Tim O'Brien, 'Ukrainians issues with 107,000 PPSNs', *Irish Times*, 25 June 2024

⁴⁴ Gabija Gataveckaite, 'Government plans to warn Ukrainians about housing crisis using social media', *Irish Independent*, 26 October 2022

be used to allocate medical cards.⁴⁵ By then, the state was accommodating more than 43,000 Ukrainians and almost 17,000 international protection applicants.⁴⁶

By then, the state was accommodating more than 43,000 Ukrainians and almost 17,000 international protection applicants.⁴⁷ (when the number of Ukrainians had reached 73,000 alongside more than 20,000 IP applicants in the system) the Cabinet considered proposals to limit State-provided accommodation for future newly-arrived Ukrainians to 90 days.⁴⁸ Nothing was decided at the time - the EU agreed to extend the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainians until March 2025) – but leading members of the government referred publicly to ‘the problem of secondary movements of Ukrainians from other EU countries’ and inferred that these occurred because Ireland welfare supports were perceived to be more generous than those given to Ukrainians in some other countries.⁴⁹

,

By May 2023, unnamed sources within the Department of Integration were briefing journalists that they were seeing a growing reluctance from some local authorities to accommodate more Ukrainian refugees in their areas due to pressure on services.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Jack Horgan Jones, ‘Government agrees to harden refugee policy as focus moves to the long term’, *Irish Times*, 29 October 2022.

⁴⁶ Jack Horgan-Jones, ‘Drop in number of Ukrainian refugees arriving’, *Irish Times* October 2022

⁴⁷ Jack Horgan-Jones, ‘Drop in number of Ukrainian refugees arriving’, *Irish Times* October 2022

⁴⁸ Jack Horgan-Jones, ‘Cabinet row over refugee housing curbs’, *The Irish Times*, 25 October 2023.

⁴⁹ Jack Horgan-Jones, ‘Cabinet row or not, the fallout has seen a shift in the Government’s stance on refugees’, *Irish Times*, 28 October 2023.

⁵⁰ Jack Power, Conor Lally, Harry McGee and David Raleigh ‘State warns of ‘growing reluctance’ to house refugees’, *Irish Times*, 16 May 2023,

In October 2023, (when the number of Ukrainians had reached 73,000 alongside more than 20,000 IP applicants in the system) the Cabinet considered proposals to limit State-provided accommodation for future newly-arrived Ukrainians to 90 days amid reports and that some 30% percent of Ukrainian arrivals in Ireland had relocated from other EU countries.⁵¹ Nothing was decided at the time Nothing was decided at the time - the EU agreed to extend the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainians until March 2025) – but leading members of the government referred publicly to ‘the problem of secondary movements of Ukrainians from other EU countries’ and inferred that these occurred because Ireland welfare supports were perceived to be more generous than those given to Ukrainians in some other countries.⁵²

In December 2023, the Cabinet signed off on plans to impose a 90 day limit on state accommodation for new arrivals from the Ukraine, during which time these would now receive the same reduced rates of benefits as asylum seekers (a reduction from Euro 220 to Euro 38 per week for adults). By then more than 101,200 Ukrainians had been granted temporary protection in Ireland of which 74,600 were provided with accommodation.⁵³

A Cabinet meeting in early February 2024 was reported to be considering reducing benefit levels for all Ukrainians.⁵⁴ In May 2024, the government announced that welfare payment levels to all Ukrainians who had arrived since 2022 would be reduced within twelve weeks to Euro 38.80 per week, the same rate given to

⁵¹ Jack Horgan-Jones, ‘Cabinet row over refugee housing curbs’, *The Irish Times*, 25 October 2023.

⁵² Jack Horgan-Jones, ‘Cabinet row or not, the fallout has seen a shift in the Government’s stance on refugees’, *Irish Times*, 28 October 2023.

⁵³ Hugh O’Connell, ‘Move to cut Ukrainians’ social welfare influenced by fears of public backlash’, *Irish Independent*, 13 December 2023

⁵⁴ Jennifer Bray ‘Refugee supports may be time-limited’, 30 January 2023

International Protection applicants who were also getting accommodation.⁵⁵ The reduced rates were approved by Cabinet on 15 May 2024 and reported as affecting around 27,000 Ukrainians who had arrived before 14 March 2024. There appeared to be a (government and opposition party) political consensus to make it less attractive for Ukrainians to come to Ireland. A 2024 Sinn Féin policy document, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works*, similarly proposed ending the two-tier system which distinguished between the entitlements of refugees admitted under the Temporary Protection Directive and IP applicants by reducing entitlements of Ukrainians to those of asylum seekers in direct provision.⁵⁶

Welfare chauvinism tends to be a political response to unwanted migration - success measured by the reduction in numbers arriving or staying - but it can contribute to the long term marginalisation and social exclusion of some of those who end up remaining.⁵⁷ It can undermine social cohesion within communities by increasing overall levels of poverty. Policies of deliberately marginalising asylum seekers by excluding them from the remit of social policies can be damaging to the communities within which they are placed.

As at May 2024, there were some 66,254 Ukrainian refugees in state-funded or provided accommodation – this included fully serviced accommodation well as pledged housing. Ukrainians who were not in employment were entitled to jobseekers’ allowance (Euro 232 per week).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Harry McGee and Pat Leahy, ‘Payments to Ukrainian refugees face cuts within 12 weeks’, *Irish Times*, 14 May 2024

⁵⁶Sinn Féin, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works* (2024) www.sinnfein.ie, p.6

⁵⁷ Bryan Fanning, *Diverse Republic* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2021), p.111

⁵⁸ Gabija Gataveckiate and Maeve McTaggart, ‘Around 27,000 refugees will have social welfare cut to just Euro 38.80 a week’, *Irish Independent*, 15 May 2024

In many ways the reception of Ukrainian refugees since 2022 has been a great success. Positive responses from host communities combined with a generous and pragmatic implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive meant that huge numbers could be absorbed in the absence of the kinds of infrastructure deemed necessary to respond to far smaller cohorts of previous refugees and asylum seekers. In some respects, responses to Ukrainian refugees recalled recent very-decisive responses to the Covid pandemic, when the State used transfer payments in decisive and innovative ways to support citizens who could not go out to work and businesses that were unable to operate during the lockdown.

The response of the State to the Ukrainian crisis and to a concurrent surge in IP applications focused on crisis management and on the incremental development of policy, including a focus on gradually shifting the future balance of refugee and IP accommodation towards state-owned accommodation. For the most part, the State relied on transfer payments and on communities and the voluntary sector. It did not develop, during the post-2022 period, any significant growth of capacity to support the integration of refugees, whether along the lines of the former Refugee Agency. In essence, the response to the Ukrainians was organised along the lines of the 'direct provision' system. It provided enhanced levels of benefits and an immediate right to work but relied on mostly-private sector accommodation sourced and paid for by the State. It did not develop the kinds of 'on the ground' state capacity to support community engagement that was once part of the remit of the Refugee Agency. No new model of organisation with a wider remit than sourcing and paying for accommodation was proposed although the case for one can be made given the anticipated need to respond to future ongoing numbers of refugees and IP applicants that may be closer to the numbers of arrivals since 2022 than envisaged in earlier debates about the direct provision system.

Post-2022 Responses to Asylum Seekers

Overall, Ireland's 2022-24 response to the arrival of Ukrainians exhibited a degree of empathy not extended to international protection applicants who arrived during

the same period. The latter, rather than Ukrainians, became the focus of xenophobia and protests against the development of asylum seeker accommodation.⁵⁹ For example, plans to move Ukrainians out of a hotel in Killarney in October 2022 resulted in local community protest in support of these refugees that led to the decision being reversed.⁶⁰ Similarly, there were reports of a ‘public outcry’ in Cahirsiveen when it was proposed that 80 Ukrainian refugees including 10 school-going children be relocated to Tralee and replaced by IP applicants. This issue occurred in a number of places where hotels had been contracted for six months to accommodate Ukrainians but when new contracts to accommodate international protection applicants were proposed host communities rallied around the Ukrainians’.⁶¹

Some NGOs and community activists campaigned against what they described as a ‘two-tier system’ that gave less support to international protection applicants than Ukrainians admitted under the Temporary Protection Directive given that those in both categories had similar needs and were initially processed at the same Citywest Centre.⁶² Throughout 2022, Citywest became chronically overcrowded as it struggled to process large numbers of Ukrainians and IP applicants.⁶³ In May 2022, the Abolish Direct Provision Campaign (ADPI), a voluntary group led by ‘victims of Direct Provision in Ireland’, posted a series of videos on Twitter/X which purported to show differences between how Ukrainian refugees and asylum

⁵⁹ Jennifer O’Connell, ‘Rise of xenophobia in Ireland approaching tipping point’, *Irish Times*, 3 September 2022

⁶⁰ Sinead Kelleher and Senan Moloney, ‘“I feel like I am home” -Ukrainian families praise local support after U-turn over move’, *Irish Independent*, October 11 2022

⁶¹ Anne Lucey, ‘Ukrainian refugees will not be forced to leave Cahersiveen’, *Irish Times*, 4 May 2023

⁶² Aideen Elliot, ‘We cannot allow a two-tier refugee response’, *Irish Times*, 26 July 2022

⁶³ Jennifer Bray, ‘Refugees told to defer travel as Citywest hub remains shut’, *Irish Times*, 25 January 2023.

seekers were being treated. Some posts described administrative distinctions between how Ukrainian refugees and international protection applicants were being treated as an Apartheid system.⁶⁴ Some subsequent @AbolishDirect posts acknowledged that conditions improved for international protection applicants once these were relocated from the Citywest processing centre. However, these issues highlighted differences between State responses to Ukrainians and international protection applicants that were sometimes mirrored by different community responses to both.

A March 2023 analysis of community responses to the arrival of hundreds of Ukrainians in Listoonvarna in County Clare concluded that although there had been some strain on local services there that been ‘more pulling together than pulling apart’.⁶⁵ However, such accounts came to be far outnumbered by media coverage which highlighted protests, anti-social behaviour, and arson attacks aimed at accommodation for IP applicants. A number of protests received considerable mainstream and social media coverage which contributed to a sense of crisis. Yet, it needs to be emphasised that there were no protests in most places identified as sites for asylum seeker accommodation. Examples of positive responses by host communities and positive experiences continued to be documented even if these did not make the headlines. Even in areas where protests occurred, coalitions of

⁶⁴ A post on 21 May 2022 referred to reports that Citywest had hundreds of refugees sleeping on the floor for days. Posts claimed that Ukrainian refugees were given beds whilst black asylum seekers had to sleep on the floor. For example, a video narrated in Arabic of a large room in Citywest processing centre where people were trying to sleep on mattresses on the floor or on chairs whilst others, including children, sat at tables. This was accompanied by text which claimed that asylum seekers were experiencing racist discrimination. Another posted on 26 May, that included a photograph of a sign declaring that only those with the appropriate wristband would be allowed entry, claimed that the sender was ‘in Citywest Hotel Direct Provision in Dublin (for) 10 days without a shower... They had a wall dividing us from refugees from Ukraine’. @AbolishDirect on twitter/X accessed September 2024

⁶⁵ Ellen Coyne, ‘This is lives over tourism’, *Irish Independent*, March 23 2023

refugee support and community groups contested claims that the anti-refugee protesters spoke for the entire community.⁶⁶

Throughout 2023, various analyses described the political mood music on the asylum seeker issue as shifting. Political parties were reported as worried that flaws in the asylum processing system - the ability to respond to the numbers arriving - was costing them support and increasing support for far-right parties.⁶⁷ In February 2023, the political editor of the *Irish Times* wrote that 'anxiety about the capacity of the State to deal with numbers arriving' had grown amongst politicians and that the consensus that Ireland could and should continue with current policies had come under strain.⁶⁸ The Green Party Minister for Integration, Roderic O'Gorman, was criticised by some other members of the government and by backbenchers for being unable to manage the asylum crisis or to come up with a strategy, ensure effective communications with host communities or even brief TDs who were being asked to respond to protests in their constituencies.⁶⁹

From February 2023 some newly arrived male asylum seekers were informed that they would not receive an immediate offer of accommodation.⁷⁰ By 4 May there were 593 homeless asylum seekers in Ireland, some of these living in tents outside

⁶⁶ Patrick Freyne, 'Refugees welcome': The other side of protests,' *Irish Times*, 28 January 2023

⁶⁷ Harry McGee, 'How political mood music on asylum u=issue is changing', *The Irish Times*, 11 February 2023.

⁶⁸ Pat Leahy, 'Anxiety mounts over refugee numbers', *Irish Times*, 24 February 2023

⁶⁹ Hugh O'Connell, 'Migration crisis rocks government', *Sunday Independent*, 12 February 2023.

⁷⁰ Jennifer Bray, 'More than 200 asylum seekers told no accommodation available on arrival', *Irish Times*, 7 February 2023

the International Protection Office in Mount Street in Dublin. These received a cash allowance but no immediate offer of accommodation.⁷¹

By May 2023 there were several hundred asylum seekers sleeping rough in Dublin, some in tented encampment in Mount Street adjacent to the IPAS building, some others in a similar encampment in nearby Sandwith Street, which was attacked by anti-immigrant protestors who had attended a rally in the city that had been attended by members of far-right groups. Videos shared online showed them dismantling makeshift shelters used by asylum seekers on Sandwith Street and some furniture and wooden pallets were set alight in a nearby laneway.⁷² Gardaí stated that far-right agitators were identified at the fringes of protests, including the one on Sandwith Street that had resulted in anti-social or violent behaviour.⁷³ During 2023, it appeared that far-right agitators became increasingly emboldened.⁷⁴ By mid-May 2023, there had been an estimated 125 protests against accommodation for asylum seekers in Dublin city that year.⁷⁵

Several months after the Sandwith Street attacks on tents near the Lower Mount Street offices of IPAS, the area still had an encampment of unaccommodated asylum seekers. The ongoing presence of tents and thrown-together shelters in central Dublin and the apparent inability of the State to address the needs of the asylum seekers and concerns expressed by local residents was described by a

⁷¹ Nathan Johns, 'It's hard sleeping outside. It's cold, it's wet. It's no life', *Irish Times* 4 May 2023

⁷² Hugh O'Connell and Ali Bracken, 'Anger over "coordinated attacks" on asylum seekers', *Sunday Independent*, 14 May 2023

⁷³ Ali Bracken, 'The Irish far right: 'They're coward...they get others to do their dirty work'', *Sunday Independent*, 21 May 2023

⁷⁴ Robin Schiller, 'Fears attack on asylum seekers' campsite will 'embolden' far right agitators' *Irish Independent*, 15 May 2023

⁷⁵ Jack Horgan-Jones, Jennifer Bray and Conor Lally, 'Gardaí war about anti-migrant protests', *Irish Times*, 17 May 2023

member of Dublin Council’s Housing Strategy Committee as ‘a system which puts hundreds of men on our streets only for the Government to then walk away’. Efforts to provide accommodation for such men in Crooksling outside the city were also widely reported as poorly organised and ineffectual.⁷⁶ Although the tents near the IPAS offices were removed and their inhabitants relocated in early May, similar makeshift camps were established by homeless IP applicants alongside a nearby canal.⁷⁷ By June 2023, there were nearly 1,400 asylum seekers sleeping rough, some for up to ten weeks.⁷⁸

Some NGO critics of the failure of the state to meet the basic needs of homeless asylum seekers in Dublin suggested (anonymously) that the presence of tents around the city sent ‘a convenient message to the general public that the government was not helping these men’. In other words, it appeared as if there was an implicit policy of minimising the support provided to some single male asylum seekers.⁷⁹ Whether or not the aim was to discourage new arrivals, it gave the message that the State was not in control, even in the vicinity of the offices of the government department responsible for managing the problem.⁸⁰ Gardai reported that between January and May 2024 some 75 anti-immigrant protests

⁷⁶ Kevin Byrne, ‘Calamity awaits if Government keeps it head in the sand over capital’s shanty town’, *Irish Independent*, 19 April 2024

⁷⁷ Conor Feehan, ‘Residents and businesses demand action as new ‘tent city’ growing along canal’, *Irish Independent*, 6 May 2024.

⁷⁸ Shauna Bowers, ‘Nearly 1,400 asylum seekers slept rough for up to 10 weeks’, *Irish Times* 12 June 2023

⁷⁹ Sorcha Pollak, ‘“Total shambles”: Stare risks repeating history with rapidly deteriorating immigration system’, *Irish Times*, 18 May 2024

⁸⁰ Ian O’Doherty, ‘Disregard for immigration concerns has created a space that has bred extremism’, *Irish Independent*, 8 May 2024

were policed in the Dublin region including many directed against asylum seekers sheltering near Mount Street and by the canal.⁸¹

By December 2023, some 26,279 IP applicants and refugees were being accommodated by the State. Of the total, 11,469 were single males, 3,376 were single females and 11,434 were couples or families with children.⁸² In March 2024 it was reported that the State hoped to develop 14,000 state-owned beds for IP applicants by 2028 (5 times the number specified in the 2021 *White Paper on Ending Direct Provision*). As at March 2024 there were just 1,184 in state-owned accommodation.⁸³ Overall the reported strategy envisaged up to 35,000 beds: 14,000 state-owned, 10,000 commercially-run emergency accommodation beds and another 11,000 contingency beds. The strategy was based on projections of up to 16,000 new IP applicants per annum between 2024 and 2028, and that those who were granted refugee status or leave to remain would be able to move on from direct provision to find their own housing.⁸⁴

However, it has proven difficult for many successful IP applicants to move out of state accommodation because of housing shortages in wider society. By December 2022, more than a quarter (27%) of those in direct provision (17,648) had leave to remain but had been unable to move out because they were unable to find other

⁸¹ Conor Lally, 'Aggression at anti-immigration protests rising, says top Garda', *Irish Times*, 28 May 2024

⁸² Catherine Fegan, 'How many, who are they and is Ireland taking more? -the facts on immigration', *Irish independent*, 13 January 2024

⁸³ Gabija Gataveckiate, 'Up to 70pc of those seeking protection here also applied in different countries.' *Irish Independent*, 28 March 2024

⁸⁴ Sorcha Pollack, 'Plans to reform asylum accommodation system need to work – and quickly', *Irish Times*, 28 March 2024

accommodation.⁸⁵ In May 2024 it was reported that a proposal that refugees who remain in direct provision accommodation after having been given permission to stay in Ireland (some 5,644 people at the time) should pay rent was being discussed by the government.⁸⁶ Some further measures aimed at freeing-up state accommodation for new arrivals have since been mooted. The problem is that what is envisaged as a temporary accommodation system for IP applicants has tended to become blocked by the inability of former asylum seekers to find housing.

Protests and Community Engagement

By 2023 the balance of media attention shifted away from the challenges of accommodating Ukrainian refugees to accounts of protests against the accommodation of international protection applicants. A recurring pattern of protests at proposed accommodation sites for these – including hotels, repurposed buildings owned by the state or vacant office blocks – became identifiable. For example, residents of East Wall, a deprived part of inner city Dublin attended protests in November 2022 against the accommodation of 380 international protection applicants in a former ESB office block.⁸⁷ These protests attracted the involvement of far-right groups from other parts of the country.⁸⁸ The

⁸⁵ Conor Gallagher, 'Refugees unable to leave centres despite asylum status', *Irish Times*, 22 December 2022

⁸⁶ Jack Horgan-Jones and Jennifer Bray, 'Direct Provision refugees may have to pay rent', *Irish Times*, 18 May 2024

⁸⁷ Colm Keenan, 'Protests over refugees in old ESB block', *Irish Times*, 21 November 2022

⁸⁸ Jennifer Bray, 'The politics of immigration: tensions grow locally as Coalition fears the rise of the far-right', *Irish Times* 26 November 2022.

dynamics of such protests, and earlier ones in various parts of the country according to one November 2022 analysis, were often as follows:

Rumours heard by locals that a building in their area is to be used to house migrants. Some begin to protest and soon a semi-official group is formed to lead it. Their complaints are reasonable: locals were not consulted by Government, accommodation is not suitable for asylum seekers and there are not enough facilities in the area.

Soon word of the protests spread and anti-immigration and far-right activists flock to the area where they start making speeches and videos denouncing the 'replacement of Irish citizens with foreign-born people'.⁸⁹

Local protesters with legitimate concerns then become intermingled with far-right agitators seeking to exploit their concerns. It emerges that communication and coordination with local community leaders has been non-existent or exceedingly poor. Public officials appear unwilling or to be incapable of engaging in front-of-house communication with either the community or the media that are reporting the claims of far-right groups as well as protestors. There is no apparent plan that might address the needs of the wider community alongside asylum seekers placed in unsuitable accommodation with little support. Unlike during the Covid crisis, there was no high-profile leadership team willing and able to explain developments and give reassurances on a day-to-day basis. As put by a Fianna Fáil TD in May 2023, the impression given was that it was the general view in the civil service that 'the best thing to do is to give no information to the community, give

⁸⁹ Conor Gallagher, 'East Wall struggles to control narrative over asylum seeker protests', *Irish Times*, 3 December 2022.

last minute information to the public representatives and playing the game that way, ... line up accommodation and pass over the keys and fill the beds'.⁹⁰

Protests in some rural areas and small towns appear to have been driven by anxieties about the arrival of relatively large numbers of newcomers into small communities or the potential loss of local facilities. For example, in January 2023 protestors opposed the use of Racket Hall, 'the only active hotel in Roscrea' which had been a focal point for community events, as accommodation for asylum seekers, and were publicly supported by local councillors and TDs. The previous accommodation of 400 Ukrainians in a convent in the centre of the town had not been opposed. Protestors also pointed to the support given to Syrian refugees in the town in 2015. An estimated 800 refugees and asylum seekers had already been settled in the town which had a population of around 5,500.⁹¹ Local people who were interviewed argued that the lack of engagement with the local community had been counterproductive.⁹² Some spoke about the apparent absence of a plan for the town which had been in decline for years that would address the needs of refugees and local people. As put by one local person: 'It feels like they're making it up as they go along. Do they actually have a proper plan for immigration?' Another local interviewee, who ran a small business in the town, stated; 'There is no joined up thinking when it comes to refugees in this country.'⁹³

⁹⁰ Cathal Crowe TD quoted in relation to a protest against accommodating IP applicants in Magowna House in Inch, County Clare in Gordon Deegan, 'Here is much better than City West. For 2 ½ months, I was sleeping on a chair', *Irish Times*, 17 May 2023

⁹¹ Eoin Kelleher, 'A severe blow to the town' – councillors' 'shock as hotel to house asylum-seeker', *Irish Independent* 13 January 2023

⁹² Conor Feehan, 'We are not racists' – Roscrea mothers take toys and clothes to asylum seekers', *Irish Independent* 17 January 2023

⁹³ John Meagher, 'The people who were making the most noise weren't from here... They were using us', *Irish Independent*, 20 January 2023

In April 2024, protests against proposals to accommodate 160 asylum seekers in Trudder House, a vacant premises owned by the Health Services Executive, in Newtownmoundkennedy, Co. Wicklow received extensive mainstream media and social media coverage. Newtown has around 3,000 residents, some of whom are themselves relative newcomers living in recently-constructed housing estates. As described in an analysis drawn on here, many residents of these new estates tend to be families with young children and this growing population has placed childcare, schools and medical services under some pressure. The area has little or no public transport. People have to travel to neighbouring towns to access many basic services. The announcement that 160 asylum seekers (single men who were not entitled to work) would be located in Trudder House was not accompanied by any proposal for integration measures or apparent supports for the wider community. As put in the analysis cited here of the views of community protestors:

There is a strong view that the Government have been very underhand in trying to railroad the accommodation centre, hiding information etc. There is plenty of truth to this view. There has been little to no consultation and information was very slow in coming out, such that it does appear that withholding information was an intentional strategy to limit opposition (I don't know whether this is true or not, but that's what it looks like). I think it is unlikely that more consultation would have led to a different outcome, however. The site of Trudder House is obviously terrible and has been chosen for the sole reason that there is nowhere else.⁹⁴

A protest march in Newtown on Sunday 28 April ' was joined by many families, older people and children, presumably local people, whilst some participants held placards with explicit nativist anti-immigrant slogans including one about stopping

⁹⁴ Micheal Byrne, 'The Newtownmountkennedy asylum protest' *The Week in Housing Blog*, Substack 30 April 2024

the ‘plantation’ of Ireland and the ‘replacement’ of Irish people and a few ‘Irish Lives Matter’ placards. The march also included ‘small groups of masked people, mainly young men.’ Far-right activists turned up and streamed the protests on social media. Some protesters against the accommodation of asylum seekers were arrested for anti-social behaviour. Three of the four subsequently charged had addresses in the town and the other had a nearby address.⁹⁵

Videos (widely shared on social media by far-right groups) suggest that some of the Newtown protestors had adopted norms of (aggressive) behaviour from other protests that had received hundreds of thousands of views online. Social media coverage of such protests - where the emphasis is often on anti-social behaviour and expressions of racism - does not necessarily reflect the range of views within localities. Much or most social media activity relating to such protests does not even originate within local communities. For example, around 80% of online posts relating to anti-refugee protests in Newtown originated from social media users in other countries, mostly from the United States.⁹⁶

Urban protests have predominantly occurred in deprived areas. Many of these have been exploited by far-right groups some have sparked violence and anti-social behaviour that, like the November 2023 Dublin riot, needs to be understood in the wider context of pre-existing social deprivation, social exclusion and an absence of social cohesion.

In July 2024, in Coolock at a former paint factory site identified for the development of a state-run International Protection centre for 500 IP applicants

⁹⁵ Karen Creed, ‘Four charged with public order offences at Co Wicklow site’ RTÉ News,., rte.ie accessed 13 May 2024

⁹⁶ Maeve McTaggart, ‘More than half of social media posts about Wicklow anti-asylum protest were from US, analysis finds’ *Irish Independent*, 3 May 2024

became the focus of protests from March 2024 that prevented works on the site. On 15 July, when works began on the site, construction equipment and vehicles were set on fire by protestors. Analyses of the July 2024 riots in Coolock variously emphasised how online disinformation and provocation by far-right groups ‘lit the torch’⁹⁷; how those arrested included ‘boys excited at the prospect of chaos, especially the opportunity to attack the gardaí for whom they clearly had a great hatred’⁹⁸; or attributed these to frustrations resulting from social deprivation in an area defined as ‘extremely disadvantaged’.⁹⁹ The incident became the central focus of an RTE television documentary on anti-refugee protests which variously focused on protesters, far-right groups, the role of the Gardaí and by attempts by a contractor to undertake work on the site and to protect his staff from violence. In this, and in other accounts of efforts to develop accommodation for IP applicants in Coolock, there was a glaring absence of any officials responsible for on-the-ground management or community mediation.¹⁰⁰

The government established a community engagement team in September 2023 comprised of staff seconded from various government departments and some media coverage of the Coolock riots reported that it had engaged with local representatives.¹⁰¹ The Team, according to a press release, was tasked with providing advance engagement with communities ‘on a case-by-case basis’ ahead

⁹⁷ Ciaran O’Connor, ‘How disinformation lit a torch in Coolock and threatens us all’, *Irish Times*, 20 July 2024

⁹⁸ Conor Lally, ‘Much of the Coolock violence appeared recreational – boys thrilled by chance of chaos’, *Irish Times*, 19 July 2024

⁹⁹ Kitty Holland, ‘Deprivation and lack of consultation at the heart of Coolock’s anger’, *Irish Times*, 20 July 2024

¹⁰⁰ *Inside the Protests*, rte.player 17 September 2024

¹⁰¹ Conor Lally, Conor Gallagher and Olivia Kelly, ‘Gardaí clash with site earmarked for asylum seekers’, *Irish Times*, 16 July 2024

of refugees moving into their areas.¹⁰² In Coolock and elsewhere this engagement appears to have been limited to low-profile communication with local representatives behind the scenes, as distinct from higher profile on-the-ground support for communities. A year after the team was announced, no information about the Community Engagement team including contact details was available online.¹⁰³

Urban protests and those that occurred in some small towns and rural areas have highlighted the need for joined up thinking that addressed the wider needs of localities as well as those of asylum seekers and refugees accommodated in these. There is a clear need to engage more effectively with host communities by anticipating the kinds of concerns that emerge again and again and by pre-emptively considering the kinds of supports that could be put in place in advance. Beyond this there is a need to proactively support inclusive localisms.

The concept of localism - the primacy of the local over other focal points of allegiance/identification (such as national or ethnic identities) - offers a valuable heuristic device with which to explore the contexts and outcomes of the intersection between politics and immigration.¹⁰⁴ Protests against asylum seekers in specific localities often coexist with efforts by community groups, NGOs and faith communities to support and express solidarity with these.¹⁰⁵ Efforts to integrate refugees and asylum seekers by the state have relied on community organisations and voluntourism to a considerable extent. However, there has been

¹⁰² Ciara Phelan, 'New team will engage with communities prior to refugees moving in', *Irish Examiner* 12 Sept 2023

¹⁰³ Community Engagement Team and Gov.ie online search 21 September 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Guntrum Herb and David Kaplan, *Nested Identities: Nationalism, Territory and Scale* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999)

¹⁰⁵ *Report of the Advisory Group*, p.36

too little investment in community development and migrant integration supports and infrastructure aimed at shoring up social cohesion.

Immigration featured as a prominent issue in opinion polls in advance of the June 2024 local government elections. However, in most localities support for far-right and single issue anti-immigrant candidates turned out to be very low.¹⁰⁶ The number of immigrant-origin councillors elected in 2024 considerably outnumbered those identified with the far-right.

The terms on which the State introduces refugees and asylum seekers can affect how communities respond to these. Unlike IP applicants, Ukrainian refugees were (for a time) unequivocally welcomed by the State. The ambivalence towards IP applicants in some localities mirrors that of the State in a context where there is much emphasis on policies and rhetoric aimed at discouraging these from coming to Ireland.

the government launched a social media campaign aimed at discouraging Ukrainians from coming to Ireland that highlighted difficulties in obtaining accommodation.¹⁰⁷ The Temporary Protection Directive would remain in operation but plans were drawn up to require Ukrainians supported by the state to pay for food and other ancillary services and that a means-test criteria would be used to

¹⁰⁶Just three candidates from far-right political parties and two independent anti-immigrant candidates were elected in the June 2024 local government elections out of a total of 949 seats: Tom McDonnell (Eire Saor) in Newbridge in Kildare and two others in Dublin; Glen Moore (Irish Freedom Party) in Palmerstown-Fonthill and Patrick Quinlan (National Party) in was elected in Blanchardstown-Mullhuddert. Gavin Pepper (independent) was elected in Ballymun-Finglas with 1,126 first preferences and Malachy Steenson (independent) was elected in Dublin's North Inner City.

¹⁰⁷ Gabija Gataveckaite, 'Government plans to warn Ukrainians about housing crisis using social media', *Irish Independent*, 26 October 2022

allocate medical cards.¹⁰⁸ By then, the state was accommodating more than 43,000 Ukrainians and almost 17,000 international protection applicants.¹⁰⁹

Various critiques of direct provision have emphasised how this system fostered the marginalisation of asylum seekers. In a November 2022 article, Catherine Day argued that the direct provision system had relegated asylum seekers into ‘the shadows of life in this country’. Putting an end to direct provision requires a focus on integrating those who are granted leave to remain into the mainstream of Irish society: ‘However, our housing, health, education, transport and planning policies still do not count these people in our future planning projections even though they will make permanent homes in Ireland. By choosing not to include a sizeable number of people in these policies we are storing up problems for the future.’¹¹⁰

In the midst of the post-2022 refugee crisis, sight has been lost of the reasons why direct provision was acknowledged as bad policy (in the Day Report and the 2021 *White Paper on Ending Direct Provision*), but what has transpired is the emergence of a far-larger Mark 2 direct provision system for both IP applicants and, potentially, other categories of refugees. If Irish society is to be stuck with some variant of direct provision this needs to be balanced by policies which proactively focus on social cohesion.

Policy Debates and Strategic Goals

¹⁰⁸ Jack Horgan Jones, ‘Government agrees to harden refugee policy as focus moves to the long term’, *Irish Times*, 29 October 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Jack Horgan-Jones, ‘Drop in number of Ukrainian refugees arriving’, *Irish Times* October 2022

¹¹⁰ Catherine Day, ‘We must factor migrants into our planning policies.’, *Irish Times*, 23 November 2022

There are not huge differences between refugee and asylum seeker policies advocated by political parties in government (identifiable from current practices) and opposition parties (identifiable from policy statements). These include recognition for measures to speed up the processing and rejection of international protection applicant claims, and a move toward state-run accommodation and away from reliance on private sector accommodation in keeping with the recommendations of the Day report. For example, like the government, Sinn Féin have proposed reducing reliance on the private sector to provide emergency accommodation by developing permanent state-owned reception and processing centres.¹¹¹ Various policy proposals that have emerged since 2022 to address rising numbers of IP applicants have focused on measures aimed at reducing numbers coming to Ireland, whether by speeding up the assessment of applicants, by extending the list of ‘safe countries’ deemed not entitled to international protection or by enforcing deportations of unsuccessful applicants, or at (the focus of this paper) improving responses to these.¹¹²

In 2024, in response to recurring criticisms, there has been a growing focus on the need for community engagement with host communities and some references, in media reports of government responses to protests, to the deployment of a Department (DCEDIY) community engagement team. Some government and opposition party statements and policy documents have referred to taking refugee

¹¹¹ Sinn Féin, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works*, p.4

¹¹² For example, Sinn Féin have proposed tripling staff numbers at the International Protection Office (IPO) from 400 to 1200 to speed up the processing of international protection applications and to ensure greater follow up on deportation orders and adding to the list of ‘safe countries of origin’ to facilitate faster processing of applications from citizens of these. A person from one of these countries would still make an application for IP, however they must rebut the presumption that their home country is safe for them. It advocated bilateral arrangements with Britain on immigration management at ports and airports which would include deportations to the UK. Sinn Féin, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works*, pp.4-8

¹¹²Sinn Féin, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works*, pp.4-8

and IP applicant numbers into consideration within resource allocation models. However, an explicit strategic focus on measures aimed at promoting social cohesion has yet to emerge.

Currently, this is the responsibility of a weak government department which has a wide range of functions. A submission to the Advisory Group on Direct Provision by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government opposed taking on any responsibility for the accommodation of refugees.¹¹³ Whatever the merits of the case the Department successfully put forward at the time when the Day Report was considering proposals for a small-scale accommodation system, there is a strong case for re-evaluating where responsibility for the provision and management of large-scale refugee accommodation should lie and for reevaluating the roles of government departments and local government.

No government policy document has addressed in detail how community engagement might be improved. The main focus has been on sourcing accommodation. There has been some discussion of allocating additional resources for services to areas based on numbers of refugees and asylum seekers hosted by these. Beyond such models of support there is a need to engage directly with host communities and areas and to be seen to do so. A greater degree of advanced planning is needed and protocols need to be established to anticipate the kinds of issues that have occurred again and again on the ground. There is a case for revisiting the 1990s Refugee Agency as a template for engaging with host communities.

¹¹³ Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, *Observations on an expert from the Draft Report of the Advisory Group in Direct Provision* ' www.housing.gov.ie accessed 20 August 2024, p.2

Future Proofing State Capacity and Infrastructure

A 2022 analysis of trends of international protection applications to Ireland by the ESRI emphasised that asylum migration is largely dependent on factors that are outside of the control of national governments. State capacity to respond to the ongoing arrival of large numbers of IP applicants is needed. As recommended by the ESRI:

These systems should not only be able to accommodate the upper limits of trends rather than averages but also be planned so that they can be deployed flexibly for other uses when applications numbers are low.¹¹⁴

The Day Report recommended the establishment by the end of 2024 of a state agency to accommodate and integrate future asylum seekers. In a 2024 opinion piece, Catherine Day wrote that ‘The work is currently being done by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth can form the nucleus of the future agency, which we recommend should be the responsibility of the department of Housing in the longer term.’¹¹⁵

The Day Report also emphasised ‘the need for early involvement of local authorities and communities in creating a welcoming environment and in supporting integration into local communities.’ It concluded that at national and local level local authorities, ‘NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in providing personalised services to applicants and help to

¹¹⁴ E. Cunniffe, K. Murphy, E. Quinn, J. Laurence, F. McGinnity, and K. Rush, *Explaining recent trends in international protection applications in Ireland, ESRI Survey and Statistical Report Series 115* (Dublin: ESRI, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.26504/sustat11>

¹¹⁵ Catherine Day, ‘We must factor migrants into our planning policies.’, *Irish Times*, 23 November 2022

compensate for many lacunae in the current official system.’¹¹⁶ It concluded that there was a need to provide some core funding to NGOs to address gaps in supports for international protection applicants. The Advisory Group emphasised the need to support local authorities and communities in preparing for and welcoming new arrivals:

*The introduction of a “new model” is an opportunity to change the narrative around the placement of applicants for protection in the community. In this regard the Advisory Group recommends that the use of the term “direct provision” should be dropped. It should be replaced by a new name for the system which reflects its true purpose, i.e. the Irish reception system. An assessment of local capacities in terms of schools, general practitioners (GPs) and medical services should be undertaken by the local authorities to help them prepare to accommodate future members of their communities and to factor their needs into local development plans. Local authorities and NGOs are currently working together to help those with protection¹¹⁷ status to find accommodation and settle into local communities.*¹¹⁸

Similarly, a 2024 Labour Party policy document, *An Ireland for All: Policy Proposals on immigration and Integration*, proposes the establishment of a new Integration, Migration and Asylum agency with responsibility for coordinating a whole-of-government response and implementing major reforms to replace the Direct Provision system. This proposed agency would be responsible for the management of the International Protection system including accommodation, employment and social support for successful applicants, and the repatriation of unsuccessful

¹¹⁶ Report of the Advisory Group , p.36

¹¹⁷ It referenced a See submission from County and City Management Association, June 2020. Will be made available on the Advisory Group page of the Department of Justice website

¹¹⁸ Report of the Advisory Group p.36

applicants.¹¹⁹ Within the text of the Labour Party and Sinn Féin policy documents, in keeping with government policy, there is a commitment to move towards a greater balance of state-owned accommodation.

In January 2023 it was reported that all government departments were asked to compile a list of extra supports that could be targeted at the 10 areas in the country with the highest numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.¹²⁰ The kinds of supports referred to included extra nurses in GP practices, more English language teachers in schools as well as targeting additional funding.

In addition to targeting additional resources into areas where IP applicants are accommodated it has been argued that these should not be placed in disadvantaged communities. Sinn Féin's 2024 *Integration Policy* document proposed that the process of identifying suitable locations should include a preassessment of the needs of communities with an emphasis on ensuring that the needs of both the community and new arrivals can be met.

The system will work best, and where it has worked best in the past, is where centres are located in areas which have the services and the capacity for them. This means better outcomes for both communities and those seeking protection including the better integration of successful applicants.

Criteria such as the availability of services including GPs and school places, proximity to transport and existing levels of disadvantage in areas should govern

¹¹⁹ Labour Party, *An Ireland for All Policy Proposals on Immigration and Integration*, pp.6-8

¹²⁰ Jennifer Bray, Cormac McQuinn and Jack Horgan-Jones, 'Ten areas taking most refugees to get supports', *Irish Times*, 17 January 2023

the selection of locations for accommodation. The Pobal HP Deprivation Index should be used for this purpose.¹²¹

In essence, the view is that the accommodation of IP applicants and the development of state-run IP centres in deprived localities should be minimised.

Inclusive Communities and Social Cohesion

Study after study has found that direct provision places asylum seekers in a degree of dependency that makes subsequent integration difficult.¹²² Direct provision is also seen to place a burden on host communities. There is a clear need for a strategic approach to community development which looks holistically at the needs of host communities, asylum seekers and other immigrants. The apparent absence of such an approach creates a vacuum which can pit host communities against newcomers. Promoting community development measures that can benefit everyone seems like the most sensible way of preventing the emergence of zero-sum perceptions and anti-immigrant localism.

Some examples of how this could be managed better might be found in Scotland where a proactive strategy of supporting refugees and asylum seekers and the rural communities in which many have been settled has been introduced. The strategy addresses the needs of dispersed asylum seekers, their employability and welfare rights, education and health. It also placed explicit emphasis on social cohesion in the communities into which asylum seekers were placed. What stands out about the Scottish approach is the upfront focus on seeing asylum seekers as members of these communities as distinct from a burden to be coped with. As put

¹²¹ Sinn Féin, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works*, p.4

¹²² Fanning, *Diverse Republic*, p.111

in the *New Scots: Integrating Refugees into Scotland's Communities 2013-2017* report:

*The Scottish Government's vision is for every community in Scotland to be strong, resilient and supportive, enabling social inclusion and renewal, as well as fulfilling individual aspirations and potential... The Scottish Government's integration from day one approach includes refugees and asylum seekers within its vision of inclusive government.*¹²³

In Scotland there is a strategic emphasis on the combined needs of existing communities and newcomers. There is a statutory obligation to include refugees and asylum seekers within the remit of community development programmes.¹²⁴ The tone of top-down leadership is also hugely different in the Scottish and Irish cases. The insistence on describing asylum seekers and other migrants as new Scots and the emphasis on including these within the remit of all efforts to promote community development and social cohesion differs from the Irish experience where communities have complained about a lack of consultation, where efforts to support asylum seekers are expected to emerge spontaneously, and where opposition to the presence of asylum seekers reflects State ambivalence towards these for more than two decades.

Inclusive localisms cannot be counted on to emerge spontaneously. Ireland's *Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future* (2017) envisaged a role for local authorities, sporting bodies, faith-based groups and political parties in building integrated communities, but puts emphasis on supporting bottom-up

¹²³ *New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities: 2014-2017 Final Report* (Scottish Government, 2017), p.3

¹²⁴ *The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act* (2015). *New Scots*, p.24

initiatives with some funding rather than by driving or strongly encouraging and emphasis on integration from above.¹²⁵

A 2023 submission by Community Work Ireland on integration and refugee issues advocated a community development approach, which recognises the reality of local challenges, the dangers of far-right interference, and the need to respond to a range of concerns within communities. It emphasised the need to ‘develop and build infrastructure to enable a strategic and proactive approach to integration, inclusion and support for refugees and asylum seekers’ and to ‘equip local communities, community workers, refugees, people seeking asylum, and community leaders to respond effectively including responding to anti migrant protests and those instigated by far-right actors.’ It emphasised the need for ‘proactive community engagement, preparation and planning in advance of new accommodation being proposed’. Specifically, there was a need to develop ‘tools, training and guidance which could be disseminated quickly to assist communities where necessary. It stressed the need to provide upfront funding for community development issues, the recruitment of additional community workers to provide on-the-ground support on refugee on refugee-related social cohesion issues to all local authorities. A focus on proactive leadership and supports to support integration and social inclusion was emphasised.¹²⁶

The IPAS website (August 2024) gives just a few lines of information under the heading: ‘Resources for communities to support integration’:

¹²⁵ Department of Justice, *The Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future* (Dublin; Stationary Office, 2017), p.13

¹²⁶ Community Work Ireland, *Briefing Paper on Integration and Refugee Issues: Submission to the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Community*, 21 February 2023, data.orieachtas.ie accessed 11.11.2024

Local Authority Integration Team: The Local Authority Integration Team (LAIT) provides ongoing integration supports to people seeking international protection, linking them with local service providers...

Community Development: Community based organisations may wish to begin to plan to support the integration of people seeking international protection. There is funding available under the National Migrant Integration Strategy for the Community Recognition Fund and Community Integration Fund.¹²⁷

Supports need to be both expanded and publicised to be promoted to counteract narratives that IP applicants are dumped into communities whose needs are ignored. Perceptions of a lack of responsiveness to communities need to be vigorously addressed. There appears to have been a tendency to hide from pre-emptive engagement with local community elected leaders and organisations. There appears to have been little emphasis on envisaging win-win situations that might challenge zero-sum narratives and secure community support.

Some of these points have been made in policy documents published by Sinn Féin and the Labour Party. Sinn Féin maintain that community engagement teams are under-resourced and have proposed putting in place a community services capacity audit for reception centres.¹²⁸ Labour's *An Ireland for All Policy Proposals on Immigration and Integration (2024)* argues that it is vital that the government, through a new Agency, implements a clear and transparent communications strategy and information sharing process aimed at local authorities, elected representatives, and community representatives in locations where international protection applicants will be housed. Other proposals include increased resources

¹²⁷International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) website accessed 12 August 2024
<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/d9f43-international-protection-accommodation-services-ipas/>

¹²⁸Sinn Féin, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works*, p.4

for Local Authority community response forums and integration officers, updated local integration strategies in each local authority and municipal district, and investment in community-based initiatives that include both migrants and Irish citizens to grow local social networks.¹²⁹

The institutional capacity for pre-emptive engagement with communities that can anticipate the kinds of problems that have recurred again and again in some deprived urban areas and in some rural areas is unlikely to be achieved by means of the current hands-off technocratic civil service-led approach. Unless the agency in charge of implementing accommodation programmes can develop a ‘boots on the ground’ model of supports that is capable of both meeting the needs of refugees and asylum seekers whilst anticipating the needs and concerns of host communities it may prove very difficult to avoid the kinds of tensions that have been exploited by far-right groups and (in some urban areas) by criminal gangs. The absence of a proactive focus on the integration of immigrants is unsustainable in a context where far-right groups, emboldened by the successes of nationalists in other Western democracies, now seek to exploit what these see as a vacuum in the Irish political landscape.

Integration policies should be designed on the premise that any deliberate or inadvertent marginalisation of newcomers imposes a potential cost on the future of Irish society if it sets newcomers up to fail or to remain marginalised. The costs of investing in their wellbeing and capacity to contribute to Irish society are negligible compared to the risks that deliberate barriers to integration may contribute to intergenerational social exclusion and damage to social cohesion. IP applicant and refugee accommodation policy and planning needs to relate to

¹²⁹ Labour Party, *An Ireland for All Policy Proposals on Immigration and Integration* (2024), p.8-11

strategic goals of promoting social cohesion within host communities and localities.

There is also a need to develop evidence-based policy that builds upon what has been found to work at a local level. A number of places in rural Ireland have put sustained effort into promoting social cohesion following some initial xenophobic responses to asylum seekers and other migrants.¹³⁰ Ongoing research and evaluation is required of policies aimed at supporting communities.

Select Bibliography

Arnold S. & Quinn, E., (2016), “Resettlement of Refugees and Private Sponsorship in Ireland”, *Economic and Social Research Institute Research Series Number 55*

Boräng, F., ‘Large-scale solidarity? Effects of welfare state institutions on the admission of forced migrants’, *European journal of political research* 54.2 (2015)

Boräng, F., *National Institutions-International Migration: Labour Markets, Welfare States, Immigration Policy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018)

Community Work Ireland, *Briefing Paper on Integration and Refugee Issues: Submission to the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Community*, 21 February 2023, data.orieachtas.ie

Cunniffe, E., Murphy, K., Quinn, E., Laurence, J., McGinnity, F. and Rush, K. *Explaining recent trends in international protection applications in Ireland*, ESRI

¹³⁰ Fanning, *Diverse Republic*, pp.105-106

Survey and Statistical Report Series 115 (Dublin: ESRI, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.26504/sustat11>

Day, C. 'We must factor migrants into our planning policies.', *Irish Times*, 23 November 2022

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), *White Paper on Ending Direct Provision* (2023), www.gov.ie

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, *Observations on an expert from the Draft Report of the Advisory Group in Direct Provision*, www.housing.gov.ie

Department of Justice, *The Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future* www.gov.ie

Fanning, B., *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester University Press, 2012)

Fanning, B., *Immigration and Social Cohesion in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011)

Fanning, B. *Diverse Republic* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2021)

Fanning, B., Veale, A., and O'Connor D., *Beyond the Pale: Asylum Seeking Children and Social Exclusion in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Refugee Council, 2001).

Fanning B and Veale A, "Child poverty as public policy: direct provision and asylum seeker children in the Republic of Ireland." *Child Care in Practice* 10.3 (2004): 241-251.

Government of Ireland, Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process (Sept 2020) www.ie,

Guntrum H. and Kaplan D., *Nested Identities: Nationalism, Territory and Scale* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999)

Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, *Report on Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process*, December 2019

Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *Briefing Paper on Integration and Refugee Issues*, 21 February 2023, data.orieachtas.ie

Labour Party, *An Ireland for All Policy Proposals on Immigration and Integration* (2024) www.labour.ie

O' Regan, C., *Report of a Survey of the Vietnamese and Bosnian Refugee Communities in Ireland* (Dublin: Refugee Agency, 1998), p123. S. Bradley, *From Bosnia to Ireland's Private Sector*, (Dublin: Clann Housing Association, 1999)

Sinn Féin, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works* (2024) www.sinnfein.ie

Scottish Government, *New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities: 2014-2017 Final Report* (Scottish Government, 2017) www.gov.scot