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# Lessons and Recommendations from the front line of Ireland's refugee response

December 2022

## **Objectives of this Paper**

1. To encourage a more streamlined approach to the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland
2. To promote strategic planning to develop a symbiosis between integration and the development of the State

## **Who we are**

The Dublin Inner City Community Co-operative Society Limited ('the Co-op') was established in November 2014. We are a membership organisation of 13 grassroots Dublin inner city community development organisations which have come together to ensure the continued delivery and protection of social, economic, environmental and cultural services within our communities. The Co-op's member organisations are operational in all or parts of Dublin 1,3,7 & 8 as well as disadvantaged city areas in Dublin 2 and 4. The Co-op operates to community development principles and a social inclusion ethos forms the basis for all our work. Advocacy on issues of social justice, poverty and transformative change forms a key component of our collective work.

## **Introduction**

The recommendations in this paper are informed by our work with refugees and asylum seekers in the inner city of Dublin, north and south of the river Liffey. CSO data reveals that the North Inner City has one of the highest concentrations of Ukrainian refugees in the country<sup>1</sup>. Ireland has also seen a high number of international Protection (IP) applicants arrive in 2022 with the figure standing at 11,142 people between the first of January 2022 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2022<sup>2</sup>. The number of Ukrainian refugees and IP applicants residing in Ireland continues to rise week on week. Although there is no data available as to the allocation of the IP applicants, we know that a high number are located within the inner city, with large accommodation sites located on North Richmond Street, the Address Hotel on Amiens Street, the former ESB building in East Wall, the Travelodge on Townsend Street and on Synge Street to name a few. In our role as a local community organisation we have been working to engage with these refugee populations to support their successful integration into Irish society. This has highlighted to us several areas where policy change and adaptation would greatly aid us in this work. We also work with the indigenous communities of the inner city. Many within these communities face intergenerational disadvantage and the concomitant vulnerabilities that flow from this. There is a disproportionate concentration of homeless accommodation, alcohol and addiction services and refugee/asylum sites in the inner city. Combined with existing disadvantage and poverty this concentration of vulnerability strains to breaking point statutory, non-statutory, education and health services in the area. The State has in effect created a poverty-hub in Dublin's inner city. A planned approach to the integration of new communities is crucial if we are to avoid the exacerbation of disadvantage in the area and to mitigate tensions flowing from fear of resource scarcity as a result. Moreover, as we have stated in previous papers to government, the number of refugees will only continue to rise due to modern migratory drivers such as climate change and conflict. As such, it is vital that we take the learnings from our experiences in relation to the unprecedented influx of asylum seekers and refugees during 2022 to inform our approach into the future. We must move from a crisis

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<sup>1</sup> *Arrivals from Ukraine in Ireland series 6 - CSO - central statistics office*. CSO. (2022, November 3). Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/FP/PAUI/arrivalsfromukraineinirelandseries6/>

<sup>2</sup> *What's new*. International Protection Office. (n.d.). Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <http://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/whatsnew#:~:text=From%20Tuesday%2008%20November%202022,application%20and%20the%20reasons%20they>

response to strategic, medium- and long-term planning. This paper is underpinned by the *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership with the Community and Voluntary Sector*<sup>3</sup> published by Government this year. We hope that the stated values and principles, in particular the principle of collaboration, can characterise our progression from crisis response to a long-term planning approach that reflects the breadth of knowledge and experience that exists across sectors and within the populations concerned.

We are working from the definition of integration outlined in the Department of Justice *Migrant Integration Strategy; A Blueprint for the Future*<sup>4</sup>. See below:

*“Integration is defined in current Irish policy as the ‘ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity.’”*

### **Housing**

Although the accommodation issue is of extremely high salience with regards to integration, it will not be discussed in detail here. However, we would like to endorse all the recommendations proposed by the Ukraine Civil Society Forum, of which the Co-op is a member, including those concerned with housing. As they have asserted, we need short- and medium-term housing solutions, with plans developed by local authorities that have a clear mandate and are adequately resourced to do so. We also recommend that the government disseminates accurate information on the housing of refugees and asylum seekers; misinformation on refugees being given houses is spreading and creating tension in the context of our housing crisis. This role could be taken on by local government such as in Portugal where local authorities carry out awareness raising campaigns to tackle discrimination and inaccurate and ill-informed narratives.

### **English language**

The first observation that we wish to make is in relation to the provision of English language classes. The English courses provided by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) were quickly overwhelmed following the unforeseen influx of Ukrainian refugees into the country. Capacity challenges were understandable initially, however, nine months into the war in Ukraine and the waiting lists for state provided English courses via the CDETb persist. Moreover, most classes did not run during the summer months. This is inexplicable and is a failure to recognise the scale of the refugee crisis unfolding in the country. As a result of these enduring capacity challenges and consequent unmet needs of refugees and asylum seekers, a patchwork of English language courses has arisen, being provided across the private, community and voluntary sector (including by church groups). These courses/classes vary in standard; some are characterised by structured lesson plans, defined learning outcomes and continuity while others operate in a less methodical fashion. Predictably, learning outcomes and the timeframes within which these are achieved differ considerably.

The development of English language ability is fundamental to integration. This is an intuitive assertion; however, it is only through working with cohorts lacking English that this fact is truly understood. From our experience, refugees and asylum seekers in the inner city are keen to engage in courses, gain employment and contribute. However, their lack of English creates major barriers for them, delaying the fulfilment of personal and career progression. Indeed, CSO data on arrivals from

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<sup>3</sup> *Values and principles for collaboration and partnership*. Search for services or information. (2022, June 1). Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d4445-values-and-principles-for-collaboration-and-partnership-working/>

<sup>4</sup> Department of Justice and Equality, *Migrant Integration Strategy* (2017).

the Ukraine in Ireland Series 7 shows that for 69% of Ukrainians with an assessed barrier to employment at an Intreo event, English language ability was an impediment<sup>5</sup>. This is a tenacious barrier; during the consultation process for the development of the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017, language acquisition was identified as a key issue for integration<sup>6</sup>. The development of English is the foundational first step in the integration process, without which all else is compromised.

During the consultation process for the Migrant Integration Strategy referenced above, stakeholders highlighted that there was a need to invest in language training for adults. Barriers to English language acquisition identified by stakeholders of the consultation included cost and availability. These needs and barriers have been amplified tremendously this year. It is for this reason that we recommend a more streamlined and structured approach to the provision of English language courses going forward, with the state taking a central role to ensure adequate resourcing that allows all refugees and asylum seekers equality of access and quality. In developing our approach to the delivery of English language courses for migrants we can look to examples of international best practise such as Portugal. As part of their Strategic Plan for Migration they deliver linguistic support programmes, Portuguese for All and Portuguese as a Foreign Language, free of charge to migrants<sup>7</sup>. The Portuguese for Special Purposes courses focus on language development for specific jobs such as in business or the hospitality sector. Local authorities are central to the implementation of the policies in the Migration Strategy in Portugal including the delivery of language courses. It is salient that we consciously evolve from our current ad hoc system, taking inspiration from examples of international best practise, to overcome unnecessary impediments to integration.

### ***Training and Employment***

The second observation we would like to make is in relation to training and employment. The *Skills for Zero Carbon* report outlines the skills and occupational shortages that exist in Ireland today and are projected to exist going forward if we are to fulfil the targets committed to in the Climate Action Plan<sup>8</sup>. The need for increased numbers of elementary construction occupations and construction operatives across the next decade was identified in this report. It also highlights that the zero-carbon sector will have to compete with other sectors such as the housing sector for workers. The occupational shortfall for the housing sector is addressed in the recently published ESRI report entitled *Increasing future housing supply: What are the implications for the Irish economy?*<sup>9</sup> It suggests that the government considers putting certain construction skills on the Critical Skills Employment Permit Programme to attract migrant construction workers. This suggestion is underpinned by research which recognises the current tight labour market and the need for additional construction workers to meet our targets set out in the *Housing for All* plan.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Arrivals from Ukraine in Ireland series 7 - CSO - central statistics office*. CSO. (2022, November 14). Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/FP/p-ai/arrivalsfromukraineinirelandseries7/>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Justice and Equality, *Migrant Integration Strategy* (2017).

<sup>7</sup> *Governance of Migrant Integration in Portugal*. European Website on Integration. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2022, from [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-portugal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-portugal_en)

<sup>8</sup> (2021). (rep.). *Skills for Zero Carbon* .

<sup>9</sup> Egan, P., Kenny, E., & McQuinn, K. (2022). *Increasing future housing supply: What are the implications for the Irish economy?*, 1–39. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26504/QEC2022WIN\\_SA\\_Egan](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26504/QEC2022WIN_SA_Egan)

<sup>10</sup> [gov.ie - Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)

Two of the key trainings needed to work on a construction site are SafePass training and Manual Handling training. We have increasingly been using our funding to pay for SafePass and Manual Handling training for refugees and asylum seekers in the inner city area. Due to the additional funding the Co-op has been allocated via the SICAP programme to work with Ukrainians, we have been able to outsource SafePass and Manual Handling training through Ukrainian/Russian as required.<sup>11</sup> However, we have a waiting list of over 150 refugees and asylum seekers of other nationalities for SafePass and Manual Handling training due to much more limited funding for these populations. The disparity in our ability to support Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian migrants in accessing occupational training is a consequence of Ireland's two-tier refugee system; see our previous statement on this issue<sup>12</sup>.

As there is a recognised need for construction site workers in the country it would seem to make sense that funding is made available for SafePass and Manual Handling training through a variety of languages. This could act as an investment for the future of State infrastructure while simultaneously creating immense positive impacts for the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. This of course would be conditional upon streamlined pipelines from such training courses into sectors and occupations in need. We would like to note here that we have a stream of non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers coming to our office every day looking for SafePass and Manual Handling training; our waiting list is ever growing. Without access to training and employment these people are often left idle. Idleness can beget mental health problems which is compounded by overcrowded and inadequate living conditions. Providing access to training and employment can help to mitigate against these negative social impacts while providing opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to contribute to the economy of Ireland. If we are to take a long-term planning approach and acknowledge that additional people are needed to enable housing and renewable energy infrastructure development, we see that access to occupational training can facilitate a symbiosis between the integration of refugees/asylum seekers and the much-needed infrastructural development of the state. The Migrant Integration Strategy recognised this potential symbiosis as can be seen from this quote:

*“As a two-way process, integration involves change for Irish society and institutions so that the benefits of greater diversity can be fully realised.”*

The *Skills for Zero Carbon* report also acknowledges the need for the development of nascent sectors in Irish society such as the offshore wind sector and the Solar photovoltaic installation sector if we are to meet our targets in the Climate Action Plan. It outlines the need for a range of engineering professions, amongst them telecommunications engineers. It states that there is currently a lack of career opportunities for telecommunications engineers in Ireland and therefore low uptake in the participation of this specialisation. This highlights the need for planning to ensure that sectors are developed alongside the delivery of training and educational courses; this incentivises people to specialise, provides job pathways and facilitates the operation and development of the given sector. The report also identifies the need for seafaring professionals to carry out an array of occupations

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<sup>11</sup> [The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme | SICAP \(pobal.ie\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> Clifford Riordan, S., & Wardick, N. (2022). *A two-tier refugee system? A Statement to Government*.

[www.dublincitycommunitycoop.ie](http://www.dublincitycommunitycoop.ie) . Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <https://dublincitycommunitycoop.ie/reports/a-two-tier-refugee-system-a-statement-to-government/>

relating to the offshore wind sector. In our experience working with Ukrainian refugees, we have found that there are people skilled and experienced in both engineering (including telecommunication engineering) and seafaring occupations. Perhaps the state should consider how the expertise of refugees and asylum seekers could be harnessed to support the development of these sectors.

This will require a more efficient system for the recognition of qualifications from countries outside of Ireland and the EU. Currently, the Co-op is working with several non-national engineers who have had to undergo a highly arduous process to have their qualifications recognised. The system is difficult to navigate as an English speaker which conveys its disabling nature for new communities. During consultation for the Migrant Integration Strategy stakeholders called for the creation of a methodology for the recognition of vocational skills. It was suggested that we could build upon NARIC which provides comparability statements, ascertaining where foreign qualifications fall on Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications, to have vocational awards recognised.<sup>13</sup>

Another barrier to qualification recognition is the requirement to have diplomas and transcripts translated which is an expensive step in the process. Due to our additional funding to work with Ukrainian refugees we have been able to arrange for the translation of such documents, however, on a systemic level this cost acts as a barrier for many people and hence delays their ability to work in the sectors in which they would create most value for themselves and society. We see similar barriers in relation to the high cost of the International English Language Testing system (IELTs), a test necessary to pass if one wants to work in numerous professions including those which are on the critical skills occupations list, such as nursing.<sup>14</sup> Again, this highlights how removing barriers to qualification recognition and consequently to integration can be beneficial to both the state and refugees/asylum seekers.

### ***Accommodation Staffing and Training***

The third observation we would like to make is in relation to the staffing of refugee accommodation facilities. The for-profit model that our Direct Provision system is underpinned by has long been criticized and is something which the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision committed to abolishing. However, what we are witnessing is the further entrenchment of the private sector in the accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers. We will focus here on the private sector staffing of refugee accommodation sites as the wider national accommodation issue is too large for us to offer any real insights/solutions to in this short paper.

Direct provision centres and accommodation facilities for Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian refugees are being privately ran, often managed by security companies and hotel managers and hotel staff without training in how to engage with traumatised individuals. In our outreach work, we have found that some facilities managers and staff are people of compassion and integrity who support residents where they can. However, this is not consistently the case. Stories from *Voices from Direct Provision*<sup>15</sup> highlights this starkly; there are numerous accounts of managers of Direct Provision centres treating residents in highly intimidating and dehumanising ways. In our experience we have sometimes found it difficult to carry out our outreach work due to an inability to contact facilities managers. Facilities management are regularly unresponsive and ignore our repeated requests for engagement. This represents a lack of understanding or care on the part of managers towards the needs of the people in their care. The situation is hindered rather than helped by the International Protection

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<sup>13</sup> [NARIC Ireland \(ggi.ie\)](http://www.naric.ie)

<sup>14</sup> [What is IELTS?](#)

<sup>15</sup> n.d. *Voices from Direct Provision Book 2*. Abolish Direct Provision Campaign, pp.9-19

Accommodation Service (IPAS),<sup>16</sup> reflecting its impenetrable bureaucracy, secrecy and isolated way of working.

It is positive that one of the subgroups of the Ukraine Civil Society Forum has begun developing training, with a focus on safeguarding, for the staff working in Ukrainian accommodation sites. However, it is unacceptable that large numbers of staff working with refugees and asylum seekers for the last twenty years have been without qualifications or training. Given the number of refugees currently being accommodated in the country the risks associated with the lack of training and qualification are being heightened. Qualifications and training in professions such as social care and social work are not always necessary to work with people compassionately and effectively. However, training and experience in working with trauma can greatly improve the effectiveness of the practitioner and the service received by the refugee/asylum seeker. Moreover, while relevant training and education does not guarantee the absence of negligence and abuse, it certainly reduces its likelihood.

The social care profession was born out of the scandals of the Magdalen Laundries, the Reformatory and Industrial Schools in which we left our most vulnerable to be cared for by people without professional training. Caring was professionalised due to the recognition that in order to protect the most vulnerable people in the state, those working on the front lines with them should be qualified to do so. However, this learning seems to have been lost. It is crucial that we recognise the value of caring professions and their fundamental role in providing for the dignity of refugees/asylum seekers. This could be achieved by an overhaul of the current staffing arrangements of accommodation sites.

While most accommodation sites are not staffed by appropriate professionals, some have NGOs such as Peter McVerry and DePaul operating within them, providing much needed support to residents. The staff of these NGOs aid integration by assisting residents in applying for PPS numbers, accessing welfare entitlements, finding English courses, occupational courses, gaining employment and the school enrolment of children. Furthermore, these staff are experienced in reaching out to and interacting with organisations such as the Co-op and know how to leverage additional support and services that they themselves may not be able to provide. Without this level of support asylum seekers and refugees are left on their own to navigate Irish systems, often without English language skills. The salience of having this support cannot be overstated. However, we have a couple observations to make in relation to NGOs operating within these accommodation sites.

Firstly, the placement of NGOs is seemingly random. In our outreach work we have found certain accommodation sites have NGOs in situ while others, the majority, do not. The presence of NGOs is crucial particularly when case working is not within the remit of facilities staff.

Secondly, our relationships, as the local development organisation of the inner city, with NGOs in situ differ substantially. Most have engaged readily, aiding collaborative and holistic ways of working which draws on all available resources, financial and otherwise to enhance the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The nature of this crisis requires collaboration. It is crucial that collaboration and partnership characterises the relationships between agencies, organisations and government departments and bodies who work with refugees and asylum seekers. The government must be seen to initiate and guide this collaborative approach to ensure maximisation of resources and service duplication avoidance.

We recommend that the government ensures that each site accommodating asylum seekers and refugees is provided with an outreach service carried out by either the local development company, a

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<sup>16</sup> [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))

relevant NGO or both working in collaboration. This process could be aided using the Geohive.<sup>17</sup> Conducting outreach in a coordinated way would help to prevent refugees and asylum seekers becoming isolated and going without accurate information and support.

### ***Collaboration with the HSE in CHO9***

We would like to highlight here and commend the positive work of the HSE in CHO9. The HSE has been under enormous pressure yet has been outward looking and collaborative in its approach to work with asylum seekers and refugees. HSE staff from CHO9 have engaged in the Health Responses to Ukrainian Refugees forum in the north east inner city since the beginning of summer. The forum acts as a space for information sharing and informal coordination. The Social Inclusion Team is highly responsive and proactive; when we have encountered clients through our outreach who are without a GP or require other medical guidance or support, we inform our contact on the Social Inclusion Team of CHO9 who promptly responds and links in with the client. The HSE have also been conducting outreach in CHO9. This is a great example of how state agencies can work effectively with the community sector to enhance the cohesive and coordinated integration of refugees/asylum seekers. We recommend that this modus operandi is employed on an obligatory basis across state agencies, such as IPAS, going forward.

### ***Hearing the voices of refugees and asylum seekers***

Action 25 of the Migrant Integration Strategy is to undertake research to assess how mainstream services are meeting the needs of migrants. Coming from a community development ethos we seek to amplify the voices of the most marginalised in the state. Therefore, we recommend the government conducts research with refugees, asylum seekers and representative groups to ascertain their perspectives on how their experience and integration in Ireland could be improved. Inevitably housing and accommodation will be paramount but undoubtedly other insights would be provided that can inform our approach going forward. This would help realise the vision of the Migrant Integration Strategy to enable migrants to contribute to policy and service development.

### ***Conclusion***

In this paper we have made several recommendations based on our on-the-ground experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers in Dublin's inner city. The recommendations in relation to English language provision, occupational training provision, streamlined qualification recognition and appropriate staffing of accommodation sites are complementary and would work most effectively if implemented in tandem. If staff in accommodation sites were adequately trained or if an NGO was present on the ground, personal action plans could be built promptly on site with clients. Personal action plans contain several steps and goals based on the needs and interests of clients. The personal action plans of our clients contain goals such as English language development, training and employment. If English language courses and occupational training courses such as SafePass and Manual Handling training were adequately resourced our clients could progress through the steps of their plans without the barriers thrown up by capacity challenges and bottlenecks. One's ability to make plans for the future allows hope to flourish even in the face of adversity. It is our wish that our observations here can contribute to the development of a system which facilitates refugees and asylum seekers to integrate, facilitating them to fulfil their potential while contributing to Irish society. We began this paper by endorsing the *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership with*

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<sup>17</sup> GeoHive is the National Geospatial Data Hub, and is designed to provide easy discovery, evaluation and access to authoritative geospatial data produced by Public Sector bodies (PSBs), as outlined in the [Public Service Data Strategy](#). [About | GeoHive Hub](#)



*the Community and Voluntary Sector.*<sup>18</sup> The practical manifestation of these values and principles in the migrant and integration space could take a variety of forms. In Portugal the Council for Migration acts a consultative body, contributing to policy development on migration issues. It includes representatives from the municipal, the state, migrant communities and the staff of NGOs working with migrants<sup>19</sup>. Whatever form our approach takes to the integration of migrants, it is key that it is characterised by coordination, cohesivity, collaboration, compassion and information sharing.

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<sup>18</sup> [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Minister Joe O'Brien officially launches Values and Principles for collaboration and partnership working with Community and Voluntary Sector ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))

<sup>19</sup> *Governance of Migrant Integration in Portugal*. European Website on Integration. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2022, from [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-portugal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-portugal_en)