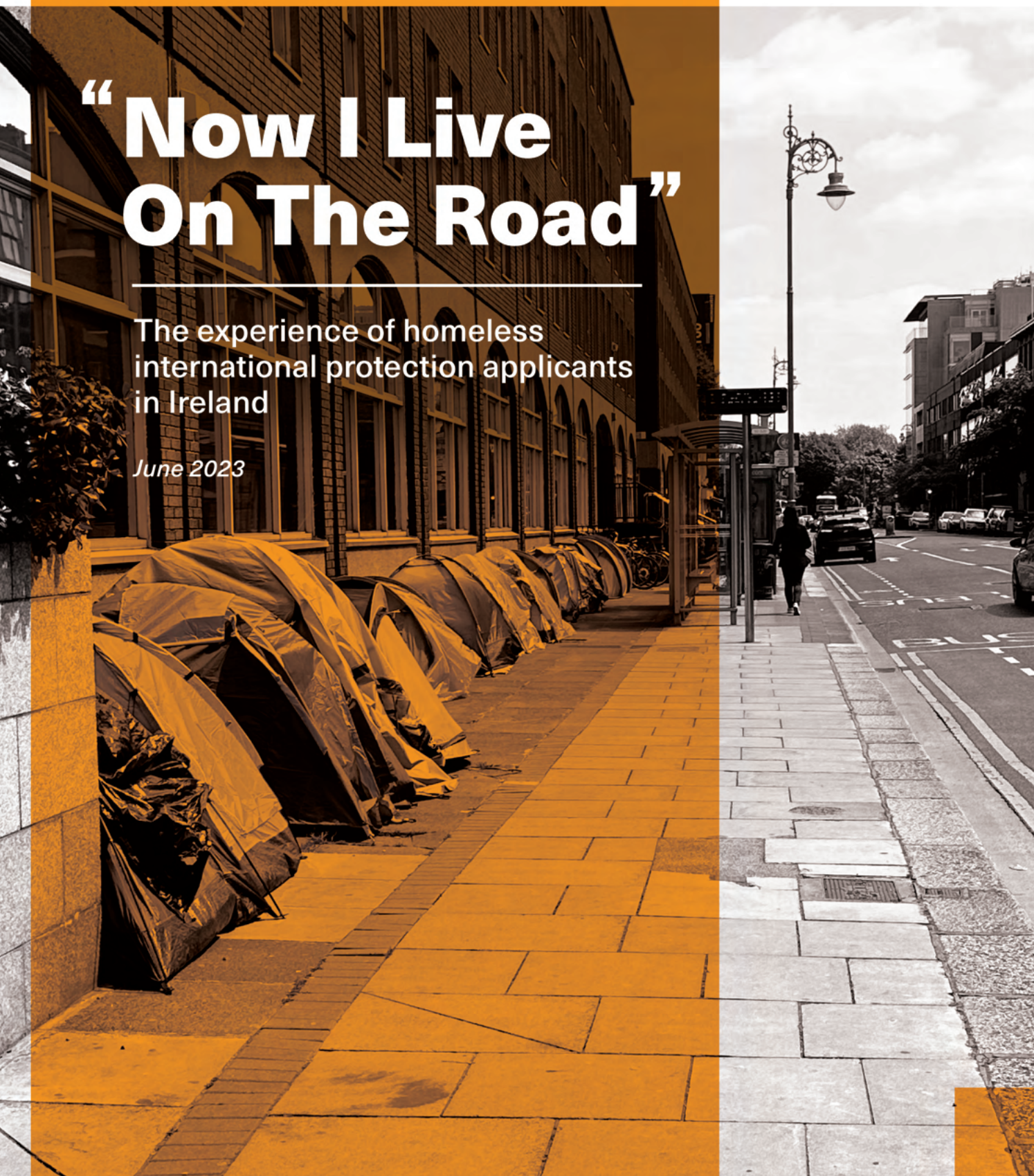


“Now I Live On The Road”

The experience of homeless
international protection applicants
in Ireland

June 2023





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Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations:

DCEDIY... Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

DEA... Daily Expenses Allowance

DRHE... Dublin Region Homeless Executive

Person seeking protection... A person who has made an application for international protection or 'asylum', often referred to as an International Protection Applicant or 'asylum seeker.'

IPAS... The International Protection Accommodation Service

IPO... The International Protection Office. This is where a person applies for international protection or 'asylum'.

PPSN... Personal Public Service Number

NGO... Non-Governmental Organisation

Material Reception Conditions... (a) the housing, food and associated benefits provided in kind, (b) the daily expenses allowance, and (c) clothing provided by way of financial allowance under section 201 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005

Person forced to rough sleep... a person forced to live or sleep in public or external spaces.

Person experiencing homelessness... a broad term which includes a variety of living situations including rough sleeping, staying in temporary shelters, and accommodation which is used due to a lack of housing and which is not the person's usual place of residence.

Tusla... The Child and Family Agency. The dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children.

A note on the title of this report

The title of this report ***"Now I Live on the Road"*** is taken from an email sent to the Irish Refugee Council by a person seeking international protection who was forced to rough sleep.

The Irish Refugee Council would like to thank all who contributed to this report, including NGO staff and GPs who are working with people seeking protection and people experiencing homelessness. In particular, we would like to extend our gratitude to the people seeking protection who shared their experiences of homelessness.

A note on typology used within this report

Throughout this report, we use the term ‘person/people seeking protection.’ A person seeking protection is anyone who has applied for international protection but has not received a final decision on their case. A person seeking protection may also be referred to as an International Protection Applicant (or ‘IPA’), or as an ‘asylum seeker.’

Unless otherwise stated, this report refers exclusively to people seeking protection who arrived in Ireland on or after 24 January 2023, and who did not immediately receive accommodation from the State.

For the purposes of this report we will use the definition of homelessness developed by [FEANTSA](#), the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, called [ETHOS](#) Light. This is used across Europe and allows for a common understanding and language to discuss experiences of homelessness. Under ETHOS Light the two most serious and extreme versions of homelessness are:

1. ‘Living rough’ refers to people living in public spaces or external spaces. This includes people living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters. This includes people living in cars, tents and sleeping rough.
2. People in emergency accommodation or night shelters. This refers to people with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelters or low threshold shelters.

It is evident from our work that people seeking protection who have not been offered accommodation by the State fall under the first category of ‘living rough’. For this report, we will use the terminology of ‘person seeking protection who has been forced to rough sleep’ to describe this group. For brevity and in order to keep the term person-centred this is often shortened to ‘person/people seeking protection.’



Photo credit: Rory O'Neill

Introduction

Eight months on from the Irish Refugee Council's [Accommodation Crisis Report](#)¹, which highlighted the 'steady downward trajectory' of standards in IPAS accommodation, Ireland's reception system is at a new low.

Since 24 January, almost 1400 people seeking protection in Ireland have not been offered accommodation on arrival and have been forced to rough sleep, some of those for over 10 weeks. This report highlights the unsafe conditions people seeking protection have endured during this time. We acknowledge the ongoing work, particularly of the Department of Children, Education, Disability, Integration and Youth, in accommodating a hugely increased number of people, both protection applicants and beneficiaries of temporary protection.

¹ - <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/news/press-release-irish-refugee-council-calls-for-urgent-action-to-address-accommodation-crisis-for-people-seeking-protection-in-ireland>

However, failure to provide reception conditions represents a breakdown of Ireland's protection process and is an unprecedented moment in the history of refugee protection in this country.

Personal testimonies from people forced to rough sleep, the Irish Refugee Council's own experience of working with more than 450 people, as well as information gathered from GPs and NGOs working with this group, paint a picture of stress, confusion and fundamental risks to health and safety.

Despite warnings late in 2022 and early 2023,² government departments did not prepare adequately for homelessness among people seeking protection. Safeguards were not put in place to ensure vulnerable people, including unaccompanied children, stayed off the street. People were not adequately informed of services and entitlements. A weekly payment was not made available until approximately nine weeks into the crisis.

A slow government response led to an overreliance on NGOs to meet the urgent needs of people seeking protection. A lack of clear communication from government departments meant that many NGOs and homeless services were inundated by the uptake in demand for their services. Government departments, (including Justice, Housing, Social Protection, Health and the Department of Children, Education, Disability, Integration and Youth), failed to plan accordingly or develop safeguards to ensure fundamental rights of people seeking protection were being met.

In a judgment delivered on 21 April, the High Court declared that the failure to provide adequate reception conditions to an applicant was unlawful and a breach of Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union – the right to human dignity.³ The findings of this report show not only a loss of dignity, but destitution among those who have been forced into homelessness.

In addition to people seeking protection who were not offered accommodation on arrival in Ireland, the Irish Refugee Council is also working with other people experiencing homelessness. There are many other people seeking protection with an entitlement to State accommodation who are awaiting an offer of accommodation from IPAS. These individuals require accommodation for a variety of reasons: private rentals or accommodation with friends or family fell through, eviction from IPAS centers, or an absence (in some cases as short as 3 days) from an IPAS center resulting in a bed space being withdrawn. Since mid-December 2022, the Irish Refugee Council Information and Advocacy service has supported approximately 100 people in this situation, many of whom have been forced to rough sleep. While this report does not consider the situation of this group of people directly, we know from working with people in this situation that their experiences are similar to those not offered accommodation on arrival in Ireland.

² - Twice in 2022, first in September and again in October, people seeking protection in Ireland were forced to rough sleep on arrival.

³ - Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf



Photo credit: Wendy Muperi

Findings and Recommendations

The following are the findings of this report which we have collected through personal testimonies of people seeking protection, the Irish Refugee Council's own experience of working with more than 450 people, and insight from NGO staff working in the sector. While we recognise the government's continued efforts to source accommodation in difficult circumstances, this report highlights several serious shortcomings in the response to, and preparation for, this crisis. We hope these recommendations contribute to the development of more informed responses while this crisis is ongoing, and in the future.

On current projections, this crisis is likely to persist for the coming weeks. Single men seeking protection will be homeless on arrival for a period of time. Everything should be done to prevent this. But much can be done to try to alleviate people's situation if they remain homeless.

Immediate Response to the Crisis of Homelessness

1. The weekly payment of €38.80 is completely insufficient to meet a person's means while experiencing homelessness. Basic services including food, mobile phone connection and transport, are unaffordable. Additional Needs Payment has not been sufficiently accessible to meet the shortfall in means. The provision of a weekly €50 voucher, while an increase, will not alleviate destitution. **We recommend that a full social welfare allowance, at least, should be provided until people are accommodated, to prevent destitution.**
2. Shortcomings in government preparedness led to an over-reliance on NGOs and homeless service providers. Many of these organisations' resources are already stretched. Justice Meenan described relying on NGOs to respond to a crisis of this nature and magnitude as "completely unacceptable."⁴
3. Communication with NGOs and homeless service providers was insufficient. Better stakeholder engagement could have led to a quicker and more effective response by NGOs. **We recommend that when crises of this nature emerge, the government should identify a point of contact whose priority is to ensure proactive communication with relevant NGOs.**
4. We welcome swift access to PPSNs for all people seeking protection. Cooperation between government departments allows for quicker access to entitlements, such as the Daily Expenses Allowance, for people seeking protection. **We recommend greater inter-departmental cooperation and communication.**
5. Currently, newly arrived protection applicants are obliged to complete their International Protection Questionnaires and, for certain nationalities, also attend a substantive interview while experiencing homelessness. Interaction with this complex legal process, including providing detailed explanations of one's past life and fears of return, is extremely challenging for a person experiencing homelessness, exhaustion and degradation. Having documents lost or stolen can negatively impact a person's claim. **We recommend that applicants be given the option of pausing their protection application until they are provided with accommodation.**
6. An effective vulnerability assessment is essential to a functioning protection process, and to ensure those most in need are identified and supported appropriately.⁵ **We recommend that all people seeking protection be assessed for vulnerabilities, as required by law, as a matter of urgency.**
7. **We recommend that the Department of Housing issue guidance to local authorities, that they engage and support international protection applicants who are at risk of sleeping rough. Ministerial guidance and direction is required in these unprecedented circumstances.**

⁴ - Judgement of Mr Justice Charles Meenan delivered on April 21, 2023, S.Y. (A minor suing by his next friend Aoife Dare) and The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth, Ireland, and the Attorney General and the Child and Family Agency.

⁵ - The Irish Refugee Council has submitted recommendations and ideas to improve the vulnerability assessment pilot. We are concerned that changes announced on 27 September 2022 are retrograde and will put inappropriate responsibility on the protection applicant and supporting organisations to complete the assessment questionnaire.

Medium Term Recommendations:

8. While we acknowledge the significant work done by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and IPAS in difficult circumstances, the basic dignity and safety of people seeking protection remains under threat due to circumstances endured while experiencing homelessness. **It is imperative that, at a minimum, homelessness among people seeking protection ceases and does not reoccur.**
9. Twenty-seven Local Authority Rest Centres, earmarked to accommodate Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection fleeing the war in Ukraine, have capacity to accommodate 1,400 people, but currently only accommodate around 200. ⁶ **We recommend that Local Authority Rest Centres are used to accommodate people seeking protection who are experiencing homelessness.**

Creating Long Term Reception Capacity:

10. There are 5,000 people in Direct Provision who have a status that would allow them to leave in theory, but who cannot in practice. **We recommend a plan, and targeted resources, to help people move out and on with their lives.**
11. Long term reception must move away from short-term solutions and an over-reliance on private providers. **We recommend a significant focus on long term accommodation solutions, which should be State owned and operated.**

Guiding principles for the future:

- **Safeguarding and protection of basic human rights:** the Irish Refugee Council is deeply concerned by plummeting standards in accommodation for people seeking protection. It is essential that health and safety, child protection and reception conditions rights are protected.
- **Resources:** ensure adequate resources for government departments, services, NGOs, and communities.
- **Personnel:** individual civil servants are working hard in difficult circumstances. IPAS needs more personnel with additional and diverse skill sets. Support is also needed for medical, educational, employment and language services across the country.
- **Communication:** better communication with people seeking protection, the general

⁶ - <https://www.rte.ie/news/2023/0519/1384563-ukrainians/>

public, and communities is needed.

- **Implementation:** ensure that existing recommendations are implemented. There are multiple reports (Oireachtas Justice Committee, Catherine Day Advisory Group, White Paper, Irish Refugee Council's detailed document on alternatives to Direct Provision and report on the accommodation crisis published in October 2022) where many of the recommendations remain unimplemented.

Homelessness in figures

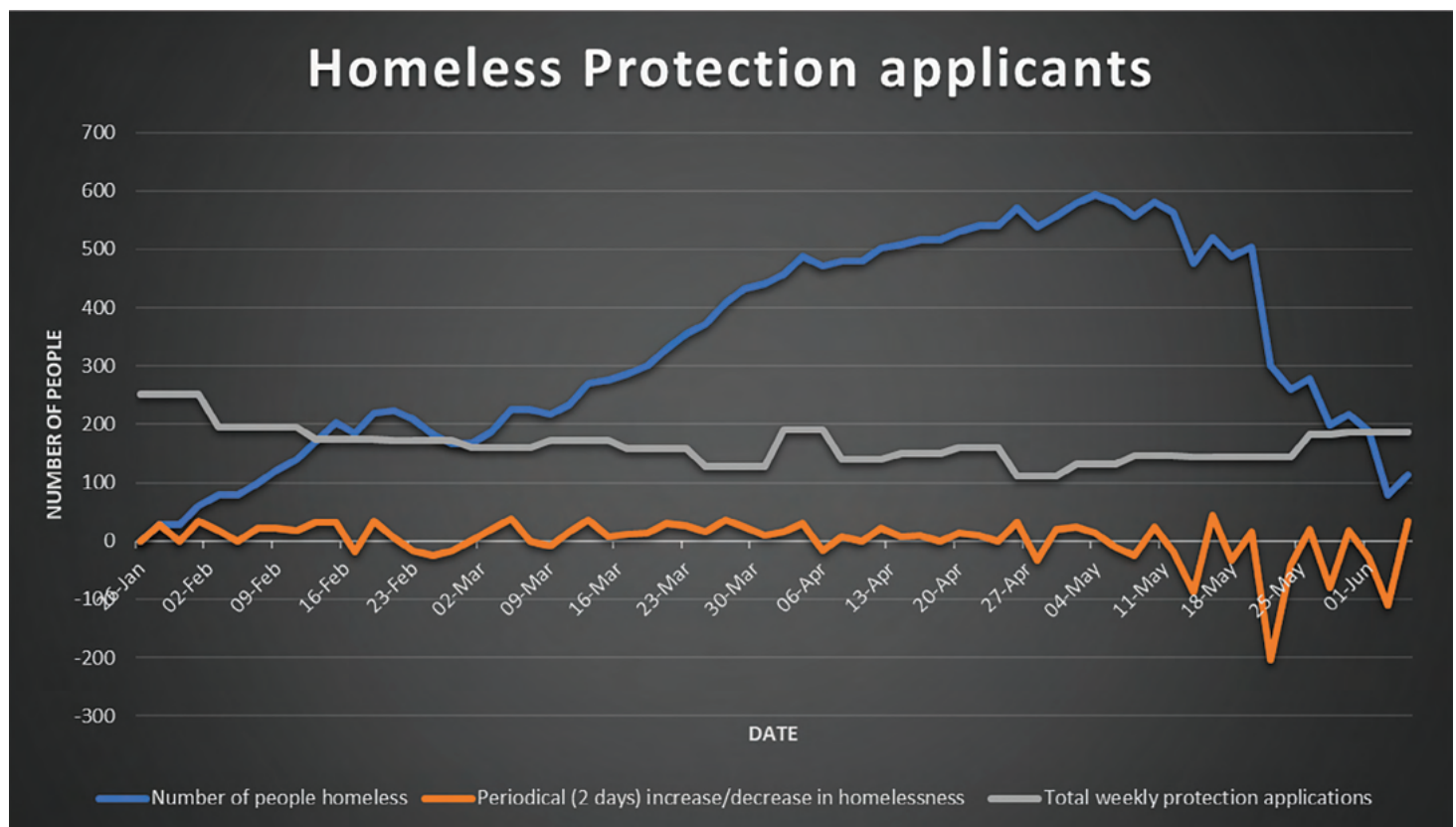
On 24 January 2023, the government stated that it would pause new intake into the City West transit hub, with the effect that it would no longer accommodate "IP adults."⁷

- According to latest figures, 1393 people seeking protection in Ireland did not receive an offer of accommodation on arrival.⁸
- As of the time of publication 61 people seeking protection are experiencing homelessness.⁹
- At its worst point, 593 people seeking protection were experiencing homelessness.
- 56 couples have experienced homelessness.
- 7 single women have experienced homelessness.
- Some people seeking protection have been forced to sleep rough for upwards of 70 days.
- Over 450 people seeking protection who have been forced to rough sleep have contacted the Irish Refugee Council for support.
- The Irish Refugee Council is supporting four unaccompanied children who have been forced to sleep rough.
- The table below shows the number of people experiencing homelessness from January to 7 June. The orange line shows the net daily increase or decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness, taking into account new arrivals who were not offered accommodation, and people experiencing homelessness who received offers of accommodation.

⁷ - IP=International Protection Applicant, also referred to as a person seeking protection or 'asylum seeker.'
<https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/489b6-citywest-transit-hub-to-pause-entry-of-new-international-protection-arrivals-to-its-emergency-accommodation-area/>

⁸- Figures accurate as of 04/06/2023, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, IPAS Weekly Accommodation and Arrival Statistics

⁹- <https://twitter.com/fletchl/status/1666874463575474187?cxt=HHwWloCw6cff9qEuAAAA>



The Law

Reception Conditions Directive and Regulations

International Protection applicants are entitled to support from the State if they do not have the means to provide for themselves. This includes accommodation and food. It also includes access to basic healthcare and a small stipend, known as the Daily Expenses Allowance (or 'DEA'), of €38.80 a week. These supports are referred to as 'material reception conditions.' The government agency responsible for ensuring international protection applicants have access to material reception conditions is the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) within the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). Material reception conditions are provided for in law under the [Reception Conditions Directive \(Directive 2013/33/EU\)](#), transposed into Irish law through the [European Communities \(Reception Conditions\) Regulations 2018](#).

High Court Cases

The Irish Refugee Council Independent Law Centre represented clients in seeking accommodation and in challenging the State's failure to provide accommodation through High Court Judicial Review proceedings. After the court granted permission to apply for judicial review, the two individuals involved were offered accommodation. Recognising the urgency of the matter and the ongoing situation of homelessness being experienced by a high number of other newly arrived people seeking protection, Mr Justice Meenan prioritised the two cases to be heard as "lead cases". Mr Justice Meenan heard the cases of S.Y. and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth and IKA and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth on 29 and 30 March 2023. Both applicants were represented by the Irish Refugee Council Independent Law Centre, Colm O'Dwyer SC and Colin Smith BL.

Having been presented with affidavit evidence of the difficulties faced by people seeking protection while experiencing homelessness, including hunger, fear, attack, and absence of sanitary facilities, and the State's failure to meet their basic needs, Mr Justice Meenan issued a judgment in respect of SY on 21 April 2023.

Mr Justice Meenan concluded:

"that the Minister is in breach of both of his obligations under the Regulations and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, in particular Article 1 thereof."

He granted the following declarations:

(i) A Declaration that the Minister's failure to provide to the applicant the "material reception conditions" pursuant to the European Union (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018 is unlawful;

(ii) A Declaration that the failure by the Minister to provide to the applicant the "material reception conditions" pursuant to European Union (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018 is in breach of the applicant's rights under Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union."

Mr Justice Meenan also commented on the inadequacy of the State's response in supporting people who are homeless:

"Directing persons such as the applicant to private charities to receive supports which the Minister is obliged to give cannot be seen as anything other than completely unacceptable... [and it]...does not come remotely close to what is required by law".

"Even though the Minister is making efforts to secure accommodation this does not absolve him of his obligations under the Regulations."

"It is clear from decisions of the ECJ on the Directive and its predecessor that even if

accommodation facilities are overloaded, alternative steps should be taken by the Minister which may include giving “financial allowances” or referring persons, such as the applicant, to “bodies within the general public assistance system” who will provide what the Minister does not.”

Access to Homeless Night Services

Emergency homeless accommodation is managed by local authorities and funded by the Department of Housing. At present, local authorities and Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) state that they have no role in providing people seeking protection with emergency accommodation. While there is no strict residency test contained within the Housing Act 1988, and therefore no legal barrier to people seeking international protection being given access to local authority homeless accommodation, in practice, people seeking protection are refused access.

On 25 April the Irish Refugee Council wrote to the Department of Housing to request that guidance be given to local authorities to support people seeking international protection who are forced to sleep rough. In our letter we refer to Justice Meenan’s statement that, where people seeking protection are not accommodated by IPAS, they should be referred to “bodies within the general public assistance system.” We received a response to our letter stating that: ¹⁰

“IPAS... is responsible for the provision of accommodation and related services to people in the International Protection (asylum) process. This service is the appropriate vehicle to provide any direction in this regard.”

While we acknowledge the pressure on homeless services in Ireland, where homeless figures are at a record high, the decision to respond to two groups of people, that are both experiencing homelessness, with different policies on the grounds of their different status and/or nationality, risks being discriminatory and is not tenable.

During this crisis the DRHE initiated their 'cold weather initiative' designed to keep people off the streets during extreme conditions. On the following page is correspondence between a member of Irish Refugee Council staff and DRHE regarding a request for an emergency, one-night-only bed during the 'cold weather initiative'.

¹⁰ - 18 May 2023

[REDACTED]@irishrefugeecouncil.ie>

Sent: 10 March 2023 12:35

To: lpasinbox@equality.gov.ie; homelesscps <homelesscps@dublincity.ie>; info@dublinoutreach.ie

Dear CPS, DubSimon, IPAS,

I am writing to you on behalf of the above-named gentleman. Authority attached.

[REDACTED] presented to our service this morning to advise that they did not receive accommodation upon applying for international protection on the 9th of March 2023.

I understand they do not have access to accommodation for the weekend.

We understand [REDACTED] has been advised by IPAS that IPAS is not in a position to currently accommodate him.

With this in mind we request that mainstream homeless services make arrangements for this gentleman. We understand that, in view of the extreme weather, extra capacity has been arranged.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Case Worker | Irish Refugee Council

From: homelesscps <homelesscps@dublincity.ie>

Sent: Friday, March 10, 2023 12:48 PM

To: [REDACTED]@irishrefugeecouncil.ie>; lpasinbox@equality.gov.ie; info@dublinoutreach.ie; Rough Sleeper Team <RoughSleeperTeam@dubsimon.ie>

H [REDACTED]

As the client is an international protection applicant, we are unable to provide accommodation. Please advise him to contact IPAS for support.

Regards,

[REDACTED] CPS (Central Placement Service)

[REDACTED] | Placement Officer | Housing & Community

Dublin City Council, Homeless Services Section, Parkgate Hall, 6-9 Conyngham Road, Dublin 8, Ireland, D08PW40

T: 01 222 6944 W: www.dublincity.ie

Letter from the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to the Irish Government

On 17 May, the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, wrote to the Taoiseach, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and the Minister for Housing to express concern over the ‘situation of street homelessness’ which many people seeking protection are forced into¹¹. In her letter she raised particular concerns for those **‘who may be minors.’** The Commissioner stated that:

“the exposure of often traumatised and vulnerable individuals to cold, rain, hunger, and distress has serious consequences for their human rights, notably the right to health. It may very well also fall short of the minimum standards under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.”

Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights states that ***“no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”***¹²

Commissioner Mijatović also made reference to the Irish High Court decision of S.Y, noting:

“the clear advice by the High Court that ongoing efforts to secure accommodation within an emergency context do not absolve the government of its obligations and that the provision of the applicant with a voucher and a referral to private charity organisations is not an adequate response.”

The Commissioner stated that the:

“current situation warrants a reconsideration of some of the more structural shortcomings of the international protection system.”

And that funding made available to IPAS:

“appears to fall short of a comprehensive resolution to the crisis at hand..”

The Commissioner also highlighted the need for government cooperation to assist people with status to move out of State accommodation and into communities:

“Close inter-departmental coordination would seem to be required, for instance, to facilitate the timely transition from emergency shelter into affordable, longer-term housing opportunities.”

¹¹ - Full letter available at: <https://rm.coe.int/letter-to-irish-prime-minister-minister-for-children-and-minister-for-/1680ab5b06>

¹² - <http://fra.europa.eu/en/law-reference/european-convention-human-rights-article-3->

The Irish Refugee Council's Support to People Experiencing Homelessness

The Irish Refugee Council Information and Advocacy Service has met and supported over 450 people seeking protection who the State has failed to accommodate on arrival. We have advocated to the government on behalf of every one of these people. We provide information on homeless day services around Dublin and refer people to services where they can collect sleeping bags, get food and shower. Due to the increased demand on our service, we recruited a dedicated Homeless Support worker in April. We also support people to complete forms and apply for supports. Caseworkers in our Information and Advocacy Service also refer applicants to the Irish Refugee Council Independent Law Centre, where they can get legal advice and representation. The Independent Law Centre has brought Judicial Review proceedings to the High Court in respect of nine people seeking protection, two of which were treated as the "lead cases."

We have written three times (24 January, 10 February, 11 March) to the government to request clarity on the services and supports offered to people experiencing homelessness. On 4 April, 10 weeks into the crisis, we received a response to our third letter. We have repeatedly raised the issue of people seeking protection experiencing homelessness through media interviews¹³. On 9 May, we coordinated a roundtable meeting of NGOs working with people seeking protection who are experiencing homelessness.

On 13 April, the Irish Refugee Council submitted an infringement complaint to the European Commission on Ireland's failure to provide material reception conditions to people seeking protection.

¹³ - RTÉ This Week, RTÉ Drivetime, RTÉ News report
News at one (recent): <https://www.rte.ie/radio/podcasts/22247385-refugee-accommodation-situation-beyond-crisis/>
Morning Ireland (middle of crisis): <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22230341/>
RTE Nes (beginning): <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2023/0119/1349645-asylum-ireland/>

Personal Experiences of Homelessness

The Irish Refugee Council has worked with over 450 people seeking protection who have been forced to rough sleep. In addition to insight from our support services, we also interviewed four people in depth, to learn more about their experience of rough sleeping. Each person had received an offer of accommodation from IPAS before we interviewed them. They experienced homelessness for periods ranging from 12 to 73 days. All names have been changed to protect their identities.

Arriving Into Homelessness

Ali was forced to rough sleep for 56 days. He spoke to us about his experience of homelessness in Ireland. We asked him about his experience applying for international protection in February:

"I told them I am new here, I don't know anyone. They asked me where I slept last night. They told me that if I don't have any other accommodation, I will be on the street."

Abdul Sattar was forced to rough sleep for 12 days before he was offered accommodation. On the day he applied for international protection:

"They gave me some pages, [they said] maybe you can go to these places and get a shower here, but I didn't go there because I didn't know the streets. It was my first day, how to find this place, this shower, this toilet...If you are not from here, how will you find this place?"

Khan experienced homelessness for 73 days. He spoke about his experience of being told there was no accommodation available:

"It was very tough for me. It was my first time out of my country... When they told me there was no accommodation, it was very painful for me. What will I do now? There is nothing, no one I know here..."

Destitution

On the week of the 27 March, approximately nine weeks into the crisis, people seeking protection experiencing homelessness were given access to a weekly payment of €38.80. Before this policy was announced, people were eligible to apply for an Additional Needs Payment, but many applicants were still left destitute.

When Ali applied for international protection, he did not have access to a weekly payment. This left him entirely reliant on his €25 Dunnes Stores voucher and the Capuchin Day Centre:

“I was given no information on supports, just a gift card [for Dunnes Stores]. A woman I met on the street directed me to the Irish Refugee Council. They told me about homeless charities. That’s how I found the Capuchin Centre. I went there every day for food.”

Ali did not know he was eligible to apply for Additional Needs Payment. When he attended an Intreo centre to collect his PPSN he asked about State supports:

“I asked about applying for funds, they told me I needed proof of address to get any funds.”

Khan was homeless for “45 or 50 days” before he started receiving the weekly payment of €38.80. This forced him, and other people seeking protection, to beg for money on the street:

“We will also tell everybody on the street, “please help me.” But nobody help. Some older people give us €5, €2, €3, then we go and buy some biscuits or something.”

Mike Obi was forced to rough sleep for 20 days. He spoke of the difficulty of surviving with no money:

“I used that [€25 Dunnes Stores] giftcard for two weeks. I had to manage for two weeks. It was difficult but I had no choice... I used it to pick things that that were important to me, like socks... When you have no money, even a bottle of water is very expensive”

The cold and wet weather forced Abdul to make some difficult decisions:

“I was sleeping in the bus station. One day I go to a place and I paid €50 for one night accommodation. I went there at 12 o’clock at night, they asked me to leave at 8 o’clock.

I had just €15 left after I paid for the accommodation. I paid because I was very tired and it was very cold in January.”

Life on the Street

Abdul told us:

“some days and nights were very hard... Night it was very cold, sometimes it was raining.”

Ali spoke about how difficult time on the street was for him:

“You can’t be on the street with nothing to eat, the government can do better than that... I got ill at some point. I went to a clinic to get some medication. It was really difficult on the street. I still have some issues and am going to see a doctor later today.”

Mike is one of many people seeking protection who was assaulted while on the street:

“I was assaulted. In night, I was being harassed and beaten up by some guys. There is nothing I could do.”

Khan also experienced harassment:

“...they threw water [at us]; many times they also punching and this kinds of things, so we run from them.”

Mike spoke about relying on the kindness of strangers:

“Sometimes I go to the shops, and they would give me the food with the stickers on [that was close to expiry]. I really appreciate those people.”

He said that meeting other people seeking protection in similar circumstances:

“helped pull me through... It’s not an easy thing, you have to summon courage.”

Difficulty Paying for Public Transport

Some people spoke about the difficulty they had affording public transport, and the hardship this caused. Mike told us:

“I tried to enter a bus. I have €20. The bus driver told me, they don’t give change. So I had to walk and carry my bag. I thought I should go back to my country to face the war.”

Khan made the difficult choice to spend his money on food over transport:

“Because I just have €7 or €8 every time, when night come we eat some[thing]. It cannot help us for [transport]. We had no money for [transport], we had to walk everywhere.”

Khan is one of many people seeking protection who experienced homelessness while observing Ramadan. He told us :

“[It was] very hard. Every day we were hungry and walking the street... very difficult and just walking. No place for sitting, no place for sleeping.”

On Receiving Accommodation

When he eventually received an offer of accommodation, Ali was given a bed in tented accommodation, which brought its own challenges:

“The tents are very cold when the weather is bad. But the services were OK. They gave us information on how to apply for social welfare.”

Ali was later moved to Citywest:

“It’s like a prison. I sleep on steel chairs or on the floor. The food is not good. It’s like a prison.”

Khan told us:

“Most time I miss my country but I cannot go there- I have a problem [there]. Here my life is safe, but I have no home here.”

Vulnerabilities and Access to Medical Care

From the earliest days of the crisis, it became clear that vulnerabilities and underlying health issues of people seeking protection were not being identified effectively by State agencies.¹⁴ Many people presented at our office mentally and physically exhausted, with health conditions pre-dating arrival in Ireland and exacerbated because of being forced to sleep rough. Since the closure of Citywest Transit Hub, Irish Refugee Council staff have been in contact with four unaccompanied children who have been forced to rough sleep; two women pregnant on arrival, and one who found out she was pregnant while experiencing homelessness; and people with serious physical and mental health conditions. The oldest person who presented at our service as rough sleeping was 62 years old, and the youngest was 17.

When a person experiencing homelessness attends the Irish Refugee Council office, they meet with a caseworker who offers information on supports and entitlements. The caseworker also records the person's details and takes information about their personal circumstances. The Irish Refugee Council has asked people seeking protection who have been forced to sleep rough to self-report any mental or physical health concerns or vulnerabilities. Many people who access the Irish Refugee Council services have conditions pre-dating their arrival in Ireland. Others have been experiencing homelessness for several days or weeks before attending our office and have developed health issues in that time.¹⁵

Out of more than 450 people experiencing homelessness who accessed our service, 38% reported a physical or mental health concern,¹⁶ including:

- Serious mental health concerns, including suicidal ideation, self-harm, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Five people with diagnoses of HIV.
- Respiratory issues including asthma and bronchitis.
- Diabetics, with no access to insulin.
- Arthritis.
- Epilepsy.
- Injuries suffered in country of origin and in transit to Ireland.

¹⁴- In response to the question, posed by the Irish Refugee Council in a letter to DCEDIY: 'What identified vulnerabilities meet the threshold of warranting the provision of accommodation, and how is this assessed?' DCEDIY stated: "Under the current Citywest pause, the list below sets out the vulnerability criteria for [International Protection Applicants] who present: • Minor children and their legal guardian(s); • Pregnant women; • Persons with a visible physical disability; • Elderly persons (65+). Staff will also have discretion to make decisions on a case by case basis where required." 5 April 2023

- Wounds requiring treatment.
- Pregnancy: On 23 March, a pregnant woman and her husband attended the Irish Refugee Council office. After advocacy from a caseworker in the Irish Refugee Council Information and Advocacy Service, the woman was accommodated, while her husband was forced to rough sleep.

Experiences of GPs working with people seeking protection

A small number of clinics in the Dublin city centre provide healthcare to people experiencing homelessness. Safetynet Primary Care, a medical charity, has reported an increase in people seeking protection accessing their services since the end of January.

Since March, Safetynet has provided healthcare to 75 people seeking protection experiencing homelessness.

Safetynet CEO reports:

“While healthcare services for people seeking protection experiencing homelessness have been flagged to them, and access to clinics and follow-on referrals is made as accessible as possible, living on the streets is always going to be bad for your health”

We spoke to two GPs who are working with people seeking protection experiencing homelessness:

A GP in a Dublin city clinic told Irish Refugee Council that in the space of one week:

“I have had three more homeless rough-sleeping Asylum Seekers since last Friday.

24-year-old man with sickle cell anemia who I referred to the hospital...

30+-year-old man with longstanding substance misuse.

22-year-old Afghan... No family or friends, no financial support from here as yet. His belongings have been stolen and he was wearing only a sweatshirt with a sleeping bag. He is suffering from profound mental health problems as a consequence. I have emailed IPAS with a letter appealing for urgent accommodation.”

Below are reports from a GP who meets with people seeking protection after they have received accommodation from IPAS. She shared some of her experiences of working with people who were forced to sleep rough:

“...An insulin dependent diabetic. He was on the streets for 10 days and ran out of his insulin on day 7... I referred him to Tallaght ER as I was concerned he was evolving

¹⁵ - As of 12 May, IPAS has emailed vulnerability assessment questionnaires to people whom the State has failed to accommodate. We do not believe this meets the threshold of a vulnerability assessment as required by the International Protection Act.

¹⁶ - This figure falls in line with DCEDIY data which states that, as of October 2022, approximately 2,114 Vulnerability Assessments were undertaken by DCEDIY, with 1,024 (>48%) individuals identified as vulnerable, AIDA 2022 Update: Republic of Ireland, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/republic-ireland/>

something called DKA which is life-threatening.”

“I met a patient who had been attacked in his own country and left for dead... He was not housed for 10 weeks, but people from his country already living in Ireland organised that he would couch surf, which he did all over Ireland.”

“One patient today reported that he... was unable to find toilets, and would hold on going to the toilet until he reached the Capuchin centre where he was able to find a bathroom. He had developed haemorrhoids over the last 10 weeks from holding on and not going to the bathroom. He had also developed a fungal skin infection, which I believe was exacerbated from not having proper accommodation.”

“One distressed patient... had been tortured in his own country. He’d been sleeping with others outside IPO. [He suffered harassment there, which] brought back a lot of fear.”

“One young man (18) ... described wandering around Dublin with severe eye infection (untreated). [He] developed a surgical emergency which required an operation... he presented as being quite vulnerable, and this story might have turned out much worse for him.”

The above shows how dangerous the homelessness experience can be. Manageable and treatable conditions which may exist prior to arrival in Ireland can become life-threatening. New conditions develop because of time spent on the street and, in particular, the mental health of people forced to sleep rough deteriorates rapidly.

Unaccompanied Children

The Irish Refugee Council is supporting four unaccompanied children who have been forced to rough sleep, after being assessed as ineligible for State childcare services.¹⁷ They have been forced to sleep rough for as long as six weeks. One child was forced to rough sleep for five weeks before he received an original ID in the post from his family and submitted it to the International Protection Office. He was forced to rough sleep for a further one week before being taken into Tusla care. This young person primarily slept at bus and train stations along with some other people seeking protection whom he met in Ireland. He told his Irish Refugee Council caseworker that he was afraid to go to a Garda station for shelter while sleeping rough because of negative experiences with police when travelling from his country of origin.

An unaccompanied child forced to sleep rough is in an immensely vulnerable situation. As well as risks to physical and mental health, there are significant threats to the child's safety. On 12 March, the Irish Refugee Council made a request to the government that anyone who presents as a minor, and is not taken into care by Tusla, should be accommodated by IPAS. This would minimise the risk of a minor being made homeless.

Informal Tent Encampments

As this crisis developed, people seeking protection experiencing homelessness began to set up tents around Dublin city centre. By the end of March, there were two tents outside the International Protection Office on Lower Mount Street. As of 8 May, this had risen to 41 tents, with approximately 60 people sleeping in the area.¹⁸ A separate informal encampment, of approximately 10 people seeking protection, had arisen on Sandwith Street “between dilapidated flats and boarded-up homes” around the same time.¹⁹ Reports state that some people seeking protection moved to Sandwith Street from Lower Mount Street after suffering harassment from passers-by.²⁰

On 11 May an anti-migrant group gathered at the Sandwith Street encampment. Again, on 12 May, an anti-migrant group gathered at the camp, along with a pro-migrant group and a Garda presence. After a ‘two-hour standoff,’²¹ Gardaí escorted all people seeking protection out of the area. Later that night, an anti-migrant group set fire to the encampment, resulting in the loss and destruction of personal belongings. The following day a rally against hate speech legislation marched through the Mount Street encampment. Reports state that ***“some of those involved in the march taunted the people staying there. There were brief scuffles between garda and demonstrators at the scene.”***²²

The events highlight the safety concerns for people seeking protection. While people may congregate in groups for safety, this can also lead to increased visibility, making them more identifiable as targets for anti-migrant groups.

17 - Of the four children: two have been re-assessed as eligible for childcare services and taken into Tusla care; two are awaiting re-assessments and are currently living in adult accommodation.

18 - <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2023/0505/1381035-asylum-seekers-tents/>

19 - <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/05/09/unprecedented-gathering-of-homeless-asylum-seekers-in-dublin-city-centre/>

20 - <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/05/12/gardai-separate-protesting-groups-at-dublin-city-migrant-camp/#:~:text=According%20to%20local%20homeless%20outreach,of%20intimidating%20behaviour%20from%20passersby>

21 - <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/05/12/gardai-separate-protesting-groups-at-dublin-city-migrant-camp/#:~:text=According%20to%20local%20homeless%20outreach,of%20intimidating%20behaviour%20from%20passersby>

22 - <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/05/15/gardai-have-sufficient-resources-to-stop-violence-against-refugees-harris-says/>

Experiences and testimony of NGOs and Service Providers

NGOs and charities providing frontline homelessness services in Ireland are experiencing immense demand on their services due to record numbers of homelessness among the general population. Many of these organisations felt unprepared to respond to a new homeless population and their needs. To gain an understanding of where people seeking protection may be sleeping, what their circumstances are, and to inform our recommendations to government, we interviewed staff in organisations working directly with people forced to sleep rough. These accounts reflect the testimonies of people seeking protection and further highlight inadequacies in communication from the government.

Below are the experiences described by staff from the following organisations: the Irish Refugee Council Information and Advocacy Service; the Focus Coffee Shop and Advice and Information Service; the Mendicity Institution; Crosscare Migrant Project and the Capuchin Day Centre.

Living Rough

Staff from several of the organisations highlighted the precarious sleeping situations of some people seeking protection. Staff noted that this makes people extremely vulnerable.

A caseworker from the Irish Refugee Council's Information and Advocacy Service noted that people seeking protection forced to rough sleep:

“are more likely to move location throughout the day and night, for fear of anti-migrant sentiments and being physically attacked.”

This may make people seeking protection less visible to homeless outreach teams, which generally look for people who have ‘bedded down’ i.e. sleeping on the street, in one place, over an extended period.

Although new to Ireland, some people seeking protection are relying on local community networks for a place to rest for a few hours. People have stated they are spending moments of respite in:

“local restaurants, benevolent individuals’ cars, couches, spare rooms, mosques and churches... public parks and bus or train stations... often people cannot tell us exactly where they sleep, as their knowledge of Dublin City is so limited.”

One person seeking protection reported spending several nights in a security cabin outside a block of flats, after striking up a conversation with the security guard working there. Another stayed at the airport for approximately 3 weeks before he was asked to leave. Irish Refugee Council staff noted:

“Relying on informal, local community support is not a long-term, reliable solution and it could bring about safety concerns. People seeking protection are vulnerable by definition of their status and the fact they are recent arrivals to an unknown country. They do not know the people they are relying on for respite.”

The Focus Ireland Coffee shop described people as:

‘staying in a variety of precarious situations. This includes but is not limited to rough sleeping, sofa surfing, sleeping in garden sheds, sleeping in religious settings.’

Focus Ireland Staff stressed that while this may make the issue less visible, it does not make it more acceptable.

Other issues arise for those who notify IPAS that they have somewhere (e.g. a friend's couch) to stay temporarily, while they are awaiting State accommodation. Irish Refugee Council staff noted:

“In our experience, people who notify IPAS that they have alternative accommodation, even if stated as temporary, are taken off the IPAS ‘unaccommodated’ waiting list and placed on the ‘re-accommodation’ waiting list, a much lengthier list for those who may have been living independently or may have otherwise lost access to IPAS accommodation. The Irish Refugee Council is working with applicants who are waiting several months on the re-accommodation list.”

A caseworker from Crosscare noted the pressure being put on diaspora groups who may be supporting people seeking protection while they remain homeless. As well as the dangers of overcrowding, financial pressure is being placed on hosts and supporters. He also noted that people who offer support to a person experiencing homelessness may be placing themselves at risk:

“People’s tenancies, which may already be precarious, are being placed at risk of eviction. Some of these situations are one mishap away from more people being made homeless.”

All services interviewed for this report highlighted the extreme vulnerability of people seeking protection. This is due to exposure to the elements which may jeopardise their health, and the unsafety of life on the streets. Many people reported being assaulted on the street. An Irish Refugee Council staff member noted:

“Many people say that when they are sleeping somewhere, strangers come and kick them, and make them move on.”

“One man presented at our service having been stabbed in the arm with a syringe.”

Destitution

Approximately nine weeks into the crisis, people seeking protection experiencing homelessness were given access to a weekly payment of €38.80. Before this policy was announced, many people seeking protection were left completely destitute. Staff in Focus Coffee Shop highlighted how limited access to financial supports can affect people's experiences:

“as a paid food service, it is difficult to provide sufficient support when the presenting customer cannot access a payment. This acts as a major access barrier to a safe space.”

The Irish Refugee Council Homeless Support caseworker reported many people have issues affording public transport:

“Transport costs are high for them. When they feel a place is not safe for them, they must move. They need leap cards or another arrangement. Some people have received fines when travelling on public transport without a ticket.”

The caseworker raised concerns that people forced into poverty may be targeted ***“by people involved in crime and prostitution.”***

Irish Refugee Council staff noted that, it is common for people to have items lost and stolen while staying on the street, either while they are sleeping or following an attack:

“Items stolen can include clothing and personal items; important documents brought from country of origin; or documents given to applicants at the IPO.”

Documents issued by the IPO, such as Temporary Residence Cards, can take months to replace and without them, access to a PPSN or social welfare payment may not be possible.

“Referring People to Nowhere”

Inadequate communication from government departments is a major issue for the staff of the Coffee Shop. Frontline workers in the Coffee Shop report that people seeking protection are very unclear about what is happening and what supports are available. Coffee Shop staff often must inform people seeking protection that there are no homeless night services available to them. Staff report that people who access their service are:

‘desperate and exhausted... It is then left to our team to deliver further bad news... It is extremely difficult having to deliver this information to people.’

Staff report having received no guidance on how to support people. They feel like they are:

“referring people to nowhere... This perpetuates the cycle of bouncing people from service to service, causing further undue stress on the individual.”

When Coffee Shop staff looked to the local authority²³ for guidance:

“the initial piece of advice... was to refer our customers back to their embassy.”

This response from the local authority demonstrates a lack of understanding of people seeking protection: many people seeking protection will not feel safe turning to the embassy of the country they have been forced to flee, and to do so could adversely affect their application for international protection.

Coffee Shop staff highlighted the inadequacy of support available to people seeking protection:

“It is now a regular occurrence that we are turning people away, with little more to offer than a generic email address [for IPAS] that is seldom answered... Our customers cannot even access a sleeping bag from the local authority.”

Staff at the Capuchin Day Centre felt disappointed by the lack of support offered to them by the government, given the increase in demand. Despite being warned by the government to expect an increase in demand, and people being directed to the Day Centre by IPAS since 24 January, they were not offered additional funding. Staff also noted that the increased pressure due to the cost-of-living crisis has made service delivery difficult.

As with staff in other services, Mendicity staff feel *“that there is a complete lack of clarity”* on the situation, and that guidance from the government is *“vague”*. They called for *“improvements in the pack received on arrival”* and suggested a pack given to newly arrived people seeking protection could include, *“a map of Dublin, a Leap card, contact details for a Community Welfare Officer.”*

²³ - Local Authorities, funded by the Department of Housing, deliver all homeless night services.

Increased Pressure and Specific Services Needed

The Capuchin Day Centre does not ask people where they are from, or their circumstances. However, Alan Bailey, Volunteer Coordinator at the Centre, says they have seen a “marked increase” in demand on their services since the beginning of the year. For example, at the end of February, the service was handing out around 1,100 food parcels weekly. At the beginning of April, this number was closer to 1,400. He has also noted an increase in demand for resources specific to rough sleeping, such as tents, sleeping bags, personal hygiene products, and use of showers. Since 1 January the Day Centre has distributed 145 sleeping bags and 84 tents at a total cost of €11,405.00, without receiving any additional funding from the government. The Centre has also noticed an increase in people attending their dinner service. Similarly, Aubrey McCarthy, from The Light House homeless service, stated the service has recently increased from feeding 70 people a night to 200 or 250 a night.²⁴

Mendicity has seen a similar increase in demand. In the seven weeks from 3 April to 19 May, 67% of people presenting at Mendicity's day service were people seeking protection experiencing homelessness. At the time of writing, the service is providing regular supports to 95 people seeking protection who are rough sleeping. Through discussions with people presenting to their service, staff at Mendicity realised that many were observing Ramadan and so were not accessing food services during the day. Mendicity made culturally appropriate provisions for clients observing Ramadan, such as packs of food to take away during the fasting period. The service also entered an agreement with the Dublin City Libraries to allow people experiencing homelessness to use an advocacy letter from Mendicity to access Library services. This is useful for anyone looking to access a safe space or use a computer.

Prior to 24 January, the Focus Coffee Shop had ‘almost zero contact’ with people seeking protection. By mid-April, the Coffee Shop had seen a ‘very noticeable increase’ in their service, to approximately 70 people seeking protection. When asked what might ameliorate the situation for people seeking protection and take pressure off the Coffee Shop, staff responded:

“We call for a drop-in service provided by IPAS or at the very minimum an accessible point of contact so that we can adequately support our customers in the way we strive to.”

The Irish Refugee Council's Homeless Support caseworker noted interest among people seeking protection in accessing the labour market and education, as well as learning practical language skills. Despite the difficulty of their circumstances, people are eager to integrate.

²⁴- Upfront with Katie Hannon, RTE, 5 May 2023





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