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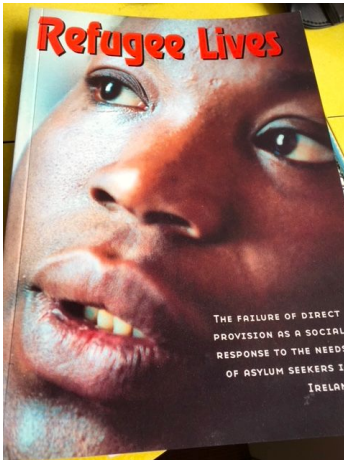
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**SUBMISSION TO OIREACHTAS JOINT COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE & EQUALITY**

**DIRECT PROVISION & THE INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION PROCESS**

31st May 2019

## Introduction



Ireland Says Welcome (ISW) is a membership group of Comhlámh, the association of returned development workers. The group represents people in favour of just, inclusive approaches to migration in Ireland. Our members have worked with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in Ireland and around the world. We meet monthly and organise outreach, awareness raising and social events to improve integration with the migrant community; we use ISW to connect our related activism on housing rights, global trade justice and other issues. We take our lead from those most affected by migration, migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees themselves, and attempt to be allies. We admire the courage of our colleagues in MASI and other migrant organisations to document and share their testimonies of life in Direct Provision.

Since the late 1990s, Comhlámh has included a group dedicated to migrant welcome and support. The first report that we are aware of looking into the harms of direct provision was published by the Comhlámh refugee solidarity group in 2001: *Refugee Lives: The failure of direct provision as a social response to the needs of asylum seekers in Ireland*. We are sorry, nearly 20 years later, to be highlighting the same inadequacies, the same injustices and the same abuses of rights that the Comhlámh group identified back in 2001. In solidarity with our friends and comrades living in direct provision, we are calling for an entirely new approach.

## The purpose of this submission

The purpose of this submission is to express our conviction that DP is not an adequate system and should be ended - and to make recommendations for improvements which would be led by the rights of the asylum-seeker rather than the economics of the state.

Direct Provision is not an effective system for reception and integration of people seeking international protection. Countless national and international agencies and reports have said as much. Some incremental improvements have been made, particularly in the wake of the McMahon report, but we contend that the issues are not in the minutiae of specific accommodation centres and conditions, but built into the system as a whole. We are concerned that Ireland has failed to learn the lessons of institutionalising marginalised people, and that we are repeating the mistakes of institutional Ireland, from magdalene laundries to industrial schools among many others.

We propose a new approach to reception and integration based on the rights of people seeking asylum and not on the economic exigencies of the state. We support the use of emergency accommodation in the short term on initial application for international protection; dramatic improvements in the speed and accuracy of processing international protection claims; support to asylum-seekers who require it to address their specific vulnerabilities; and removal of the multiple unnecessary barriers to integration which the current system imposes. We make specific recommendations related to the resourcing and administration of alternative housing options which flow out of the specific expertise of one of our members. We insist that all of these issues need to be addressed within a holistic and person-centred system, and removed from the remit of private for-profit agencies.

## Summary of recommendations in this submission

Our overarching recommendation is that the system of direct provision should be ended, and the issue of reception and integration of refugees and asylum seekers should be approached from a human rights based perspective.

### Reception

- Continue to provide emergency accommodation on arrival to asylum seekers, but cap this provision at a maximum number of weeks, regardless of the progress of the international protection application. End the system of direct provision as it is currently constituted.
- Ensure that a vulnerability assessment is conducted on arrival to assess the specific needs of individuals seeking international protection, and provide corresponding care including trauma-informed counselling, health services and so on.

### Welfare

- Ensure that all asylum-seekers have a vulnerability assessment on commencement of the international protection system, to identify needs related to experiences of torture, persecution and trauma. The model provided by Spirasi, which provides trauma-informed, holistic wraparound services for people affected by torture, is a good example of what is needed.
- Aim for comprehensive supports at key regional centres so that asylum-seekers do not have to travel to Dublin. Relevant supports include trauma-informed counselling; physical and mental health; legal and citizens information, career guidance as well as comprehensive language teaching.
- Provide asylum-seekers with access to social welfare. In as much as possible, the default should be full integration into society with the full right to work and access to social welfare including child benefit and housing assistance. Extend full job seekers benefit to the under 25s to allow them pay rent top ups and move on from DP.

### Processing International Protection claims

- The Reception and Integration Agency should re-frame its focus way from 'contract management' and fulfill its obligation to provide *meaningful integration* between asylum seekers and host communities.
- Fully implement the EU Asylum Procedures Directive to ensure that all applicants for international protection are treated with due respect and consideration for their experiences: this guarantees the right to an interviewer of the same sex; to be interviewed without other family members present; and to be interviewed by staff with training or access to gender expertise. Monitor and report on this.
- Apply legal support earlier in the process to help increase rate of positive first decisions and reduce proportion of cases stuck in appeal cycle.
- Provide proactive language support prior and during the interview with the support of competent interpreters in order to ensure accuracy and understanding of the implications of the questioning.

- Review the application form and support information supplied to see if they could be shortened or if required information could be obtained more efficiently using more accessible language or other aids to facilitate understanding e.g. graphics/diagrams.
- Provide clearer information on case progression such as an online tracking system with expected dates for next stages in the application case so that applicants can plan and use waiting time more constructively.
- Set up official or legal constructs where private service providers are required to be more publicly visible and accountable to help realign interests to the core values of the Direct Provision system, i.e. providing for vulnerable asylum seekers as opposed to protecting companies earning significant revenue streams. Companies need to be incentivised to align with aspirations of process improvement, currently a long drawn out claim process has the commercial benefit of long term occupancy and full capacity.

## Housing

- End the current system of direct provision institutional camp-style accommodation centres.
- In recognition that this places additional pressure on an already overloaded housing market which has experienced decades of under-investment, urgently build government funded social and affordable housing.
- Allow those in DP access Homeless HAP higher payment to allow them move on to private rented.
- Extend the audience who can chose to avail Red Cross Migration programme to include all those in DP. Resource the Red Cross and other agencies to provide similar services.
- Fully resource community sponsorship initiatives with key workers, support to oversight organisations and technologists, and monitor closely for challenges. We note that senior technologists from the volunteer technologists have current services pledges in the Register of Pledges and are ready to engage.
- Fund CS Regional Support Organisations to ensure they can perform their oversight duties and act as a point of escalation for community groups.

## 1. Welfare and Conditions

The many issues with welfare and conditions in direct provision accommodation centres have been comprehensively documented by government agencies (most recently in the 2018 report of the ombudsman Delivering Outcomes published last week); UN agencies (e.g. CEDAW); NGOs (e.g. IRC; Akidwa; Safe Ireland; Doras Luimní) and civil society groups such as ourselves. In particular, the issues were outlined comprehensively in the McMahon report in 2015, resulting in some partial changes in some accommodation centres. Since then, the most comprehensive adjustments have been the increase in the weekly allowance granted to both adults and children in Direct Provision, and limited provision of cooking facilities in some centres. However, the McMahon report failed to recognise the inherent limitations of long term institutional living: controls over living conditions, eating arrangements, near total supervision of the parental role, isolation and mental health ailments which, according to MASI, seem to be worsening rather than improving at present. These conditions are inappropriate for long periods of time, and it is well known that some people remain in the system for as long as twelve years.

Our concerns about welfare and conditions - all comprehensively documented - include the following:

Many if not most residents are recovering from trauma or suffering from PTSD. Many residents are children. While all residents bring skills and capabilities, many have greater vulnerabilities than is common in mainstream society. Living for lengthy periods of time in essentially emergency accommodation is not appropriate. The impact on the mental health of residents is clear and well-documented, and numerous suicides and attempted suicides have occurred in the centres over 20 years, most recently in Monasterevin in March of this year.

The conditions of accommodation centres, while acceptable for a short term reception system, are not appropriate to long term living. We include in this the continued lack of control over food that most residents experience; small bedrooms, often shared with adult strangers; multipurpose use of bedrooms for living, eating and studying as well as sleeping; and inappropriate communal areas.

We are very concerned about the effect of these institutional settings on power relations, with residents having little or no power, and service staff having, and at times abusing, power. This is apparent in unnecessary demands for adult residents to sign in and out of centres, justify departures of longer than three nights, present identification in order to collect their post, as well as more petty abuses perpetrated by individual staff members.

We are particularly concerned about the impact of institutional living on families and especially on children, whose experiences of their parents growing up are of individuals without autonomy, without jobs, without the freedom to cook and invite guests, set apart from mainstream society. We note that the McMahon report highlighted the increased risk of children experiencing domestic violence, given the congested setting that they live in, as did the Eleventh Report of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection to the Oireachtas (2018).

We note in particular the inappropriacy of the system for women, who are often made vulnerable to sexual violence. We note that although there is a guidance note for safeguarding, it does not include prevention of violence but only responses. Protection for the dignity and privacy of people at times of vulnerability is not present: this is also true of LGBT residents, and children.

While improvements could be made to the accommodation centres - and in some cases they have been made - the issues with institutional living will remain. These are, primarily, a power imbalance between residents and staff which allows for abuses and is dehumanising; and the exclusion of people who are forcibly inhibited from integrating into Irish society.

The location of many accommodation centres far from cities results in residents needing to take long and costly journeys to access work, education, healthcare and social lives and can result in severe isolation. Although the government has introduced the right to work for asylum seekers, very few people have been able to take this up because it is so limited. You can only apply for a permit for six months at a time which restricts the types of jobs you can go for and is often a deterrent for would-be employers. Job applications are refused due to documentation issues - you can't retain a passport or driver's licence when you are in the system so it's very difficult to set up a bank account. Asylum-seekers are often affected by racism and prejudice related to the DP system itself (eg Michael, Afrophobia in Ireland). Work permits should be issued on a more comprehensive basis, for indefinite duration, and individuals should be able to move to live close to work opportunities, and to gain driving licenses.

While interpreters are provided at Baleskin Reception Centre for people who need to access medical services, this is not always the case for asylum seekers staying in direct provision accommodation centres around the country when they visit local GPs. All too often, people are dependent on other family members or other people staying at the accommodation centre to interpret for them. This means that there is no patient confidentiality and may mean that some people are reluctant to access medical services. Asylum seekers who have limited English have to rely on informal strategies to 'get by', relying on informal interpreters, including children; Google Translate; and body language. This leads to inaccurate diagnoses and problems with treatment which, in turn, makes it difficult for them to trust the quality of the care provided. This is particularly problematic in primary care.

We note finally that many residents of direct provision are highly educated and skilled; many are strongly motivated to participate in Irish society; and many choose to volunteer their time rather than feel idle. These characteristics should not be requirements of people who come to Ireland seeking protection; but they certainly should be facilitated where they exist.

## **Welfare & Conditions: Recommendations**

### **Reception**

- Continue to provide emergency accommodation on arrival to asylum-seekers, but cap this provision at a maximum number of weeks, regardless of the progress of the international protection application. End the system of direct provision as it is currently constituted.
- Ensure that a vulnerability assessment is conducted on arrival to assess the specific needs of individuals seeking international protection, and provide corresponding care including trauma-informed counselling, health services and so on.
- Provide asylum-seekers with access to social welfare. In as much as possible, the default should be full integration into society with the full right to work and access to social welfare including child benefit and housing assistance. Those with additional support needs should be identified through a vulnerability assessment on arrival.
- Aim for comprehensive supports at key regional centres so that asylum-seekers do not have to travel to Dublin. Relevant supports include trauma-informed counselling; physical and mental health; legal and citizens information, career guidance as well as comprehensive language teaching.

## **2. Efficiency of the current system of processing International Protection claims**

### **2.1 Legal Support – Earlier and More Frequently in the Process**

A recurring theme speaking with asylum seekers and support groups on the ground including MASI and the IRC is that any legal support tends to be allocated later in the process, e.g. on appeal. Our understanding is that the typical practice is to provide one single legal support visit per case, which tends to be scheduled prior to the first interview (i.e. later in the process after forms have been filled and the application has been initiated). Given the complex legal landscape that they are faced the current levels of support seem meagre and inadequate; asylum seekers should be given the dignity of more access and more timely support. If a concerted effort was made to provide legal support at the reception stage a large proportion of cases that currently get stuck in the appeal cycle could potentially reach an earlier positive decision. This may also result in a better use of IPO resources and reduced waiting times for applicants.

Ireland has one of the lowest positive first instance decision rates in Europe as per publically available statistics (e.g. Eurostat). In other words, most people who are stuck in the system for longer periods are waiting for a follow up interview on appeal. It would be more efficient if these first instance decisions were positive to begin with rather than being overturned on appeal. Anecdotally, a lot of the time an application is rejected due to administrative inconsistencies in the application form, e.g. timelines/dates supplied, insufficient information etc. An applicant may not have access to all the details required at the time of filling out the form, or may not be prepared due to lack of awareness on the process. They may have difficulty interpreting the official language and the requirements. It is well-established that narratives of trauma are frequently inconsistent and fragmented (Eastmond 2007), so that failing to adhere to the principles of internal coherence and accuracy does not in any way indicate falsehood. This does not appear to be well understood in asylum hearings in Ireland.

If the support was given earlier in the process and the international protection tribunal did not adopt an automatically sceptical approach to applicants, appeal may be avoided in the first place and an asylum seeker's journey through the process may be quickened.

### **2.2 Language Support - Earlier and More Frequently in the Process**

Asylum seekers face enormous challenges in understanding complex legal procedures, their rights and obligations very often without adequate language support. Typically asylum seekers are given a single booklet explaining their legal obligations, which is often only provided in a limited number of languages.

Asylum seekers are expected to fill out the exhaustive 62-page application form/ questionnaire, which will define their application claim within the first months of their process. The level of language support provided to ensure full comprehension what is being asked of them, and to allow for accurate expression of their claim in advance of this critical stage is significantly lacking. Inaccuracies at this stage adds increased complexity at interview stage.

Similarly when asylum seekers attend for interview at the International Protection Office, their oral account is extremely important. Interviewers tend to focus on inconsistencies in asylum seekers' accounts of why they have fled their home country. Proactive language support prior to interview, and during the interview with the support of competent interpreters needs be provided in order to

ensure accuracy and understanding of the implications of the questioning and will undoubtedly expedite the process.

### **2.3 Application Form Review**

Regular complaints are made about the length and detail of the application form. Granted a significant amount of detail is required to assess a case to the required degree. Could the language perhaps be made more accessible to help elicit the correct information required at the form-filling stage, rather than misinformation being captured due to misinterpretation? As per the previous point, the majority of asylum seekers won't have English as a first language, and any overly official language or jargon is likely to add a further layer of confusion. Whilst translated versions have been made available the coverage isn't exhaustive as yet and some questions have arisen on the accuracy of some translations. The IPO may need to consider introducing standards for translation and interpretation, or thorough pre-testing at least. Also translating an already complicated document may not be getting to the root of the issue - if the base document could be streamlined and made more user friendly that could also have the effect of facilitating subsequent translation.

### **2.4 Review process**

There may be false economies in some rule-based early assessment of cases, e.g. country of origin. For example, a case may be rejected based on the applicant being from a certain country, automatically putting it down the appeal channel and adding an extended period onto processing time. The EU Asylum Procedures Directive provides clear guidance on ensuring that applicants are treated with due respect and consideration for their experiences: its implementation should be ensured and monitored. It may be worth reviewing the perceived efficiencies of some rule-based early assessment, potentially some early review of case specifics might actually cut out overall processing time.

### **2.5 Case timelines - lack of information**

From discussing cases directly with asylum seekers, a common complaint is that applicants have no idea on the progress of their case and no idea when they will be called to interview. The wait times vary greatly and sometimes applicants can be in the dark relating to their progress for many months or even years. In terms of psychologically dealing with the process and the wait, some clearer information on case progression would be useful. Also it would allow an applicant to plan on how to best use their time during the wait, e.g. if they know they are due to be waiting for an extended period it may allow them to apply for a work permit and use their time more constructively to engage in activities that support their general integration. An online case progression tracking system with target dates or some other form of transparency would be useful here.

As an indication, in independent review the UNHCR noted that provisional statistics from the Irish authorities indicated that there were approximately 5,200 people awaiting a decision from the IPO at the end of 2017. This was up more than 1,000 over the course of the previous 12 months in spite of the introduction of a new single procedure in December 2016 intended to reduce processing times to six months. The IPO describe time ranges for first interview, e.g. 8-10 months, but there is no guarantee or commitment on how long the full application process will take, as we have seen the appeal cycle can run on for years. According to UNHCR European Union law requires states to ensure that decisions are made on applications as soon as possible,



and in normal circumstances within six months. Many countries have laid down such time limits in national law with a majority of countries setting the limit at six months.

## **2.6 Private Service Providers – misaligned interests**

It has been well documented recently that a conflict of interests can exist where private companies are used to provide services to Direct Provision centres where there are profits to be made. For example the special feature in The Sunday Business Post ‘Cashing in on Direct Provision’ on 19/05/2019 identifies numerous companies earning multi-million revenues from housing asylum seekers. It’s hard to refute, that in some instances where commercial strategy is concerned it’s in a company’s interests to keep the system of Direct Provision going rather than working toward an alternative. And is it in a commercial enterprise’s interests to create more efficient flow-through if they stand to make potentially higher and more consistent revenues from centres at full capacity with long term residents?

There is a spectrum here of course with some companies having a good track record, but there are a huge number of cases where there have been abuses in the provision of services and the relationship between providers and residents. This is referenced earlier in the document and evidenced by recent resident protests in a number of centres reported in the media in the first half of 2019 (e.g. Clonakilty, Mosney).

What is also quite startling is how it is possible to operate as a private service provider yet provide little to no accountability to the consumers of your services. Companies are setting up multiple purpose built investment structures to limit losses and to limit the requirement to publish accounts. Companies can enjoy high earnings whilst hiding behind a shell structure and not necessarily have to directly face consequences of sub-standard service or public scrutiny of accounts. It would appear the provision of DP services is becoming a popular, and lucrative, investment strategy - this seems starkly at odds with what the system is set up for, to shelter vulnerable human beings needing asylum.

Take for example the Balaghadereen Direct Provision centre which is operated by a service provider ‘Townbe’. When you try and find information on this company online, the best you will find is company registration information on a generic company registration site. No website, no contact information, no accountability. Taking the query to contacts who have access to associated public records you will find connections to associated companies but again a trail of shell structures. In the context of providing services to asylum seekers, who needs protection?

If service providers were required to be more accountable to the consumers of their services as part of the conditions of their contract it may generate an uplift in the quality of services provided. This seems to be the construct in most other service industries.

The provision of services should be rights based and needs driven rather than profit driven.

## **Efficiency of the Current System: Recommendations**

- Fully implement the EU Asylum Procedures Directive to ensure that all applicants for international protection are treated with due respect and consideration for their experiences: this guarantees the right to an interviewer of the same sex; to be interviewed without other family members present; and to be interviewed by staff with training or access to gender expertise. Monitor and report on this.

- Apply legal support earlier in the process to help increase rate of positive first decisions and reduce proportion of cases stuck in appeal cycle.
- Provide proactive language support prior and during the interview with the support of competent interpreters in order to ensure accuracy and understanding of the implications of the questioning.
- Review the application form and support information supplied to see if they could be shortened or if required information could be obtained more efficiently using more accessible language or other aids to facilitate understanding e.g. graphics/diagrams.
- Provide clearer information on case progression such as an online tracking system with expected dates for next stages in the application case so that applicants can plan and use waiting time more constructively.
- Set up official or legal constructs where private service providers are required to be more publicly visible and accountable to help realign interests to the core values of the Direct Provision system, i.e. providing for vulnerable asylum seekers as opposed to protecting companies earning significant revenue streams. Companies need to be incentivised to align with aspirations of process improvement, currently a long drawn out claim process has the commercial benefit of long term occupancy and full capacity.

### **3. Alternatives to Direct Provision**

#### **3.1 Alternatives to Direct Provision : Context**

Any discussion on alternatives to Direct Provision (DP) must be considered in the context of the wider housing crisis. Suffice to say we support the building of social and affordable housing of a good standard i.e. own front door, separate kitchen/living, bedroom(s) and bathroom.

It is true that releasing people from DP will place additional pressure on the wider housing crisis in the immediate term, and so the rights of asylum seekers cannot be considered in isolation from the housing system as a whole. We are of the concerted view that unless a serious effort is made to build social and affordable housing, the problem of housing asylum-seekers and refugees will never be adequately addressed. Ireland can house all of its people, in addition to the minuscule numbers who arrive from overseas seeking international protection.

Accommodation is particularly pressing concern for those 700 refugees who have received refugee status but who remain in DP because they have been unable to secure accommodation. This is a growing segment that are spending years in DP even though they have the legal designation and social welfare supports that should allow them to leave. This is particularly true for the under 25s on reduced Job Seekers payments. The lack of affordable accommodation (particularly that accept HAP) is becoming a major factor in whether people can move on from DP.

A key characteristic of the existing approach to asylum seeker reception is that applicants typically experience a long period of limbo while awaiting a decision, where there are strict rules about engaging in work or integration activities. This is followed by the expectation that, once status is granted, integration moves swiftly. Kreichauf (2018) identifies a 'campization' in reception arrangements, where facilities bear similar hallmarks of separating asylum seekers during this limbo period in 'closed' facilities, in the margins, or away from receiving societies.

The present approach to asylum seeker reception in Ireland appears to be following the campization approach, drastically limiting opportunities for meaningful integration. Regardless of the duration of an international protection claim and subsequent appeals, nobody should live in camp-style accommodation for longer than a few weeks at most. During a period when Ireland is again experiencing economic prosperity, the chance for Ireland to fulfill its moral and legal obligations under international protection and reception directives is being lost. Ireland is failing people seeking international protection from persecution. The system needs radical change. The change should come from compassion and respect for human dignity and rights.

We are of the opinion that resolution of the issue of housing will require a package of solutions rather than any single one approach. Where feasible, we support giving asylum seekers full rights to work and access social welfare payments so that they can begin to integrate in society. Below, we outline some approaches which may contribute to a more rights-based, people-centred approach to housing asylum seekers.

### **3.2 Alternatives to Direct Provision: Red Cross Migration Programme**

The Red Cross Migration team's programme goal is to enable migrants and refugees in Ireland to live a life full to their potential. They do this by providing housing and/or wrap-around supports to 173 Service Users through their team of four government-funded Case Managers. This is an entirely optional service which is currently available to a very limited segment of those in the asylum process. We encourage that programs such as this are opened to all migrants and refugees. Case Managers support their clients in moving out of Direct Provision, into donated, or private-rented accommodation. Case Managers conduct a Vulnerability Assessment and provide ongoing support, identifying and removing blocks to progress for example, by making appropriate referrals to support services. The Case Managers workload entails supporting around 35 Service Users each, at various stages in their integration journey. This represents a heavy case load for the needs of the particular group of service users that engage with the Red Cross, including a large portion of young men who travelled here alone.

The Red Cross have housed 11 families and 36 single people in pledged accommodation (accommodation offered on a charitable basis for at least 1 year). They have housed 7 families and 26 single people in private rented, and 3 families in local authority housing. Particularly where accommodation is required for individuals in receipt of HAP sourcing private rented accommodation is problematic.

### **3.2 Supporting Technology: The Register of Pledges**

Pledged accommodation is being administered by the Red Cross using the Register of Pledges application. This is a website where members of the public pledge their spare bedrooms or vacant accommodation for use by a refugee for a period of at least one year. Pledge records are reviewed daily by the Irish Red Cross via a back office application. Notes and status are maintained on pledges through their life cycle. This facilitates easy matching of properties with service users and facilitates convenient reporting both internally for operational purposes and reporting on the program in aggregate. The value of the pledged accommodation that has been donated by the public equates to approximately an €800k saving in rent.

Further information about the register of pledges and the Red Cross case management system are included in an annex to this document, outlining the strengths of these systems and the details of their implementation.

### 3.3 Community Sponsorship Ireland

The new Community Sponsorship model is welcomed. This loosely resembles the Canadian model, customized in a joint effort across UNHCR, and multiple Irish NGOs and charities to suit the Irish context. Community Groups will be encouraged to welcome a refugee into their community by raising money (€8k + €2k in-kind) and supporting the family in their integration over 18 months including securing accommodation for them in the community. A number of pilots are underway, with Community Groups being supported by regional support organisations like the Irish Red Cross, the Refugee Council and NASC.

The current guidance documents provided by the Department of Justice are at:  
<http://integration.ie/en/ISEC/Pages/WP19000003>

Learnings from the Red Cross Migration Team program would suggest that the role of the Regional Support Organisations (RSOs) should not be underestimated. Both from a Case Management perspective and a Monitoring and Evaluation perspective the RSOs should be sufficiently resourced to oversee and facilitate integration safely and measurably. The need for intensive Case Management could be minimised with intelligent screening of community groups and Service Users, and informed matching of families to communities for the mutual benefit of both the arriving family and the community. The role of technology supports should not be underestimated. Current methods for tracking community groups include paper documents and disparate spreadsheets and documents maintained by the RSOs. There is no visibility as yet of the proposed potential Service Users likely now in camps in Greece/Lebanon/Italy. The lack of a single view will make matching arbitrary which can lead to failed matches and will make any type of reporting and the co-ordination and prioritization of resources problematic.

Community groups should be facilitated to sign up online, settlement plans should be completed and screened in a shared back office application. As an open-source platform the Register of Pledges could be cloned and customized for Community Sponsorship. It is suggested that Case Management information should not be maintained in Salesforce for Community Sponsorship. The multi-agency nature of the project, and the potential that a wider group may be contributing to the case file would lead to licensing costs being incurred. Instead the Case Management capability should be built in to the Java Application. Having both Supply and Demand in a single database will facilitate better and more convenient matching and support of Community Groups and Service Users. Significant further development will be required to facilitate complex user admin as will be required in a multi-agency system, with different RSOs having access to their own (and only their own) community group and relevant family data. Some role should have visibility of all all groups and families in order to match groups to families. RSOs must have access to a greater level of detail about their family groups in order to oversee integration. An ability to report on Community Groups, RSOs and Service Users at appropriate levels of detail must also be facilitated.

### 3.4 City of Utrecht's 'Refugee Launchpad'

Rather than viewing asylum seekers as being a burden, Ireland needs to move away from the shameful and damaging policies of dispersal, isolation and campization and realise the benefits of meaningful integration both to Ireland as a host society and to people seeking asylum here. Presently policies are being implemented that are taking asylum seekers out of the main urban centres. Whatever the reason for this, it is wrong and should be reversed. We need to take an urban approach to integration – realising the benefits of meaningful integration. Pursuing meaningful integration will ultimately benefit host communities and asylum seekers. An innovative

approach is underway in the City of Utrecht, which has in many ways defied national policies of exclusion.

Utrecht's Refugee Launchpad, known locally as 'Plan Einstein' is the innovative approach of the municipality of Utrecht and its partners in the field of reception and integration of refugees. In the Overvecht district of the city, asylum seekers and refugees lived together with young local people, while residents from the neighbourhood were invited to take courses together and engage in social activities in a shared social space. With courses in English and entrepreneurship, asylum seekers and local residents work on their professional future, no matter in which country that future lies. This co-living, co-learning reception facility aimed to develop asylum seekers' social networks with neighbours, while providing opportunities for each to develop their skills, to enhance wellbeing and community cohesion in the city. The core target group remains, of course, the refugee community. However, by mixing refugees with neighbourhood participants, potentially opposing groups are thought to bridge a gap and experience mutual support instead of growing alienation. More information on Utrecht's launchpad programme, known as 'Project Einstein' can be found on the link below:

<https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/UIA-policy-briefing.pdf>

Presently, the State invests little in meaningful integration. The Reception and Integration Agency's approach is reactive, not proactive. NGO's and volunteers provide only limited gap-filling for this, for example the recently initiated ISPCC Mosney program is attempting to set up structures whereby community navigators from within the centre can orientate new residents and provide ongoing support. These types of simple but effective programs should be rolled out across all centres, and importantly the local host communities need to be engaged to allow bonds to be created. While the alternative to change is bleak, the solutions can be simple - human interaction. Asylum seekers are desperate for the change to integrate with their host communities but the State is systematically hindering this by perpetuating the cruel and damaging system of isolation.

### **3.5 Alternatives to Direct Provision Conclusion**

We believe that the Direct Provision accommodation system should be ended immediately, and acknowledge that this will place a new pressure on the already overwhelmed housing sector in Ireland. We are further of the belief that there is no single "silver bullet" solution to the problem of housing, and that a blended package of responses will be required. Where possible, people in the international protection process should be enabled to access housing on the same basis as Irish citizens, with access to social protection payments as necessary. We have outlined some additional supports which might underpin this approach. Although the numbers have been small to date the Red Cross Migration Team's work, and the pilot Community Sponsorship program suggest there is an opportunity to engage the public in integration efforts, particularly with regard to the acute issue of housing. Opening these programs up to a wider group of recipients is to be essential. These examples show us that collaboration across government, NGOs/charities and civil society can be effective but needs well defined operating models and supporting technologies in order to scale safely.

**Alternatives to Direct Provision: Recommendations**

- Build government funded social and affordable housing.
- All state-supplied housing should be offered on a rights based approach, rather than an efficiencies-based one.
- The Reception and Integration Agency should re-frame its focus way from 'contract management' and fulfill its obligation to provide meaningful integration between asylum seekers and host communities.
- Extend full job seekers benefit to the under 25s to allow them pay rent top ups and move on from DP
- Allow those in DP access Homeless HAP higher payment to allow them move on to private rented.
- Extend the audience who can chose to avail Red Cross Migration programme to include all those in DP. Resource the Red Cross and other agencies to provide similar services.
- Fully resource community sponsorship initiatives with key workers, support to oversight organisations and technologists, and monitor closely for challenges. We note that senior technologists from the volunteer technologists have current services pledges in the Register of Pledges and are ready to engage.

# Annex

## Supporting technology: the register of pledges

In addition to accommodation pledges, pledges of goods and services are also possible. Donations of goods are one of the main contributions the public can and want to make at a time of crisis. However, transport, sorting, storing and distribution can be so expensive, it actually costs money to manage the process. Centralising goods is discouraged using this system, avoiding unnecessary transport and storage costs. By capturing pledges of goods as opposed to centralising goods, the operator need only take up those pledges that are required and are viable. Similarly, people are very willing to donate their time and expertise, but they need to be facilitated to do this.

A refined operating model should be devised and resourced to allow public good will in the form of Goods and Services be channelled to those in need more efficiently. To reduce the administration overhead of Goods and Services further a web front end exposing Goods and Services pledges directly to Services Users (behind secure login) eliminates the administration overhead. It also introduces an element of choice for the Service User. Personally Identifiable Information could be stripped from the Goods and Services Pledges when exposed in this way. Service users could message pledgers and on acceptance from the Pledger they could proceed with communicating in order to arrange the exchange of goods/the provision of services. (It is suggested that this self-service functionality not be applied to accommodation pledges and that a professional Case Manager remain involved in the matching decisions for accommodation.)

[www.redcross.ie/pledge](http://www.redcross.ie/pledge)

This is a Java Spring Application with a MySQL database residing in an Amazon Web Services instance owned by the Irish Red Cross. The application is open-source and the only cost incurred is the hosting in AWS. (€100/month)

### 3.2.2 Supporting Technology: Case Management System

In order to be effective in their role, Case Managers maintain records on the Service Users they work with. This includes contact details, vulnerability assessments, support requests and Service User's continual self-assessments. Self-assessments are completed by Service Users whereby they score themselves quarterly against the following dimensions to gauge their integration needs: Housing, Health, Employment, Education & Training, Social Inclusion & Bonding, Access to Rights and Entitlements, Active Citizenship. These assessments allow the Red Cross prioritise scarce resources, and improve their internal operations by gaining an understanding of what improves the integration outcomes for their clients. Further, the data can be anonymized and reported in aggregate for accountability and funding purposes.

[www.salesforce.com](http://www.salesforce.com)

The Case Management System is a customized Salesforce instance owned by the Irish Red Cross. No costs are incurred as Salesforce provide 10 free licenses to charities.

The technology supporting the program was donated by a group of volunteer technologists, and supported by one mid-level government funded technology role for 1 year. The value of the technology support donated is in excess of 250k. The combination of the Register of Pledges application and the Case Management system have the potential to increase the resources available to migrants and refugees, and will facilitate the allocation of scarce and disparate resources with minimal administration overhead for optimal holistic outcomes or migrants and refugees.