

## **Transitional supports for persons granted status including ease of access to mainstream State services**

**Extracts from: “Towards a New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Ireland” (UNHCR May 2014, RICE Report, Refugee Integration Capacity and Evaluation in Europe)**

Available online: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52ca8a6d4.html>

### **Outline:**

- The RICE report draws on a process of consultation with refugees (71) and stakeholders, and on existing literature, and identifies policy areas which have been suggested by refugees and stakeholders as relevant and sometimes critical for the integration of refugees in Ireland.
- In Ireland, a mainstream approach to the provision of services to refugees and other migrants has been taken. Intercultural strategies for wider migrant integration have been adopted by different government departments and specific strategies for the integration of refugees have been drawn up.
- The study highlights the following as significant policy areas in the Irish context:
  - Active Citizenship
  - Housing
  - Employment
  - Access to Information
  - Social Inclusion
- The recommendations that are proposed aim to aid policy-makers when drawing up refugee-specific integration strategies, their measurement and their evaluation.

### **Housing:**

Some key points in relation to housing are noted below, followed by the main recommendations contained within the report:

p.26:

- A study with migrants conducted by Focus Ireland and the Immigrant Council of Ireland, found that limited eligibility for services, lack of English language, and a lack of familiarity with the social welfare system, in many cases determined the level of exclusion experienced by migrants and shaped their experiences of homelessness and their ability to move on from situations of homelessness.

p.42:

- Stakeholders point out that new communities are at a higher risk of becoming homeless, especially since rent support for housing and social welfare blend into each other. Difficulties may arise in keeping accommodation such as in cases when the landlord increases the rent, but for most refugees interviewed, the main problem was actual access to housing, especially in the initial stages after their protection status has been granted.
- Refugees, upon being granted refugee status, have in general three to six weeks to leave the accommodation centre where they had been living, in many cases, for years. Both refugees and

stakeholders stated that the limited support of moving on assistance after leaving Direct Provision system is of concern and requires urgent attention.

p.44:

- One stakeholder noted, people who are reliant on social welfare support are also in competition in the housing market with people who are working and time is of the essence to secure accommodation.
- Even if refugees manage to save the deposit and the first month's rent, administrative delays in processing social protection payments and in particular rent supplement claims, means that some, in particular men, find themselves in situations of temporary homelessness. In some cases, they are evicted from accommodation and lose their deposit.

### ***Recommendations on housing:***

1. Measures should be taken to support refugees during the transition period from when they are granted refugee status, leave the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision) and seek to build a new life including the sourcing of accommodation.
2. The accessibility of accommodation for newly recognized refugees should be reviewed with a view to identifying how current challenges in the private rental market and the social housing system might be overcome.
3. The length of time refugees stay in the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision) prior to their recognition as refugees should be reduced to lessen the disempowerment and dependency the system can produce.

### **Employment:**

Some key points in relation to employment are noted below, followed by the main recommendations contained within the report:

p.65-66:

- Employment was identified as one of the main facilitators for integration. However a lack of English language competency, discriminatory attitudes and an inability to access the 'Back to Education Allowance' immediately after leaving the Direct Provision system were all identified as barriers to accessing employment.
- Long periods without access to the labour market or further education create a gap in the Curriculum Vitae and lead to atrophy of skills. Additional considerations included problems accessing documentation in the country of origin for the recognition of qualifications. Trauma and/or mental health issues experienced by refugees were further relevant considerations.
- Access to internships and voluntary work were identified as facilitators which would give refugees access to their first job in Ireland. This allowed refugees to provide references for future employment opportunities and include Irish experience on their Curriculum Vitae.

### ***Recommendations on employment:***

1. Existing good practices including the provision of English language classes, diversity awareness raising activities and access to voluntary work opportunities should be enhanced

2. Measures should be taken to address barriers faced by refugees including; the recognition\_of qualifications, access to documentation, access to social and educational supports upon recognition as a refugee and discriminatory attitudes
3. The length of time refugees stay in the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision) prior to their recognition as refugees, during which access to the labour market is not permitted, should be reduced.
4. Additional integration support measures including further education, advanced language training and access to the labour market should be extended to long stay residents in the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision). Such measures could prepare refugees for subsequent integration and lead to improved opportunities for those not recognized as refugees on return to their country of origin.

### **Access to Information:**

Some key points in relation to access to information are noted below, followed by the main recommendations contained within the report:

p.67:

- There are a substantial number of information sources; however, information between sources can often be conflicting which may act as a barrier to integration. This can lead to misunderstandings, as well as delays in information sharing and communication.
- Induction courses, which are currently only available for resettled (programme) refugees, can help offset some of these barriers. So too can contact with NGOs, English language teachers and 'Irish contacts'.

### ***Recommendations on access to information:***

1. The provision of consistent and timely communication between State agencies, NGOs, and community groups should be considered
2. Existing good practices in place for resettled (programme refugees) and contact with NGOs, English language teachers and Irish Contacts should be extended to refugees recognized by the Irish refugee determination procedure
3. Enhanced access to information should also be extended to asylum-seekers awaiting the determination of their asylum applications.