



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
agus Comhionannais
Department of Justice
and Equality

Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Direct Provision

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Content

1. Background and Introduction	3
2. Terms of Reference	4
3. Executive Summary and Recommendations	5
a. Procurement of accommodation	7
b. International Protection Process	9
c. Vulnerability Assessments	10
d. Management of State services to applicants during the process	10
e. Better provision for children	11
f. Access to health services	12
g. Access to the labour market	13
h. Enabling people to leave State supported accommodation	13
i. Contingency planning for numbers arriving	15
j. Governance	15
4. Overview of Direct Provision	16
5. Statistical Information and Context	22
6. Challenges within the system	29
7. Current Initiatives to Respond to Challenges	37
8. Longer Term Strategies for providing Supports	42
9. Experience in other EU Member States	43
10. Appendices	
A. Membership of Inter-Departmental Group on Direct Provision	48
B. Dates on which the IDG met	49
C. Reception Conditions in EU Member States	50

1. Background and Introduction

An Inter-Departmental Group on Direct Provision (IDG) was established under the chairpersonship of Oonagh Buckley, Deputy Secretary General of the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) to review the implementation of the State's obligations under the EU Directive 2013/33/EU, European Union (recast) Reception Conditions Directive, (the 'Directive') and to consider the Direct Provision services offered to applicants while their applications are being assessed.

The committee held its first meeting on 29th May 2019.

The direct provision system encompasses the range of State services directly provided to international protection applicants through all the relevant government departments and agencies. It is a whole of Government support system for those seeking international protection in Ireland. Applicants, without means to support themselves, must be offered supports but are not obliged to accept them.

The direct provision system involves the following:

- The DJE/ International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) which provides accommodation, food and additional related services for international protection applicants;
- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) which provides for a daily allowance and exceptional needs payments;
- The Department of Education and Skills which provides for the education needs of children;
- The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) which provide for the health care of applicants;
- The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) which, through its funded agencies, responds to pre-school, child welfare and protection requirements and via the TUSLA Educational and Welfare Service (TESS) which assists with the enrolment of children in schools;
- The Legal Aid Board which provides free legal advice and representation to protection applicants to advance their claims for protection.

The direct provision system, which has been in place for 20 years, replaced the practice of giving a cash payment only to new arrivals who then had to fend for themselves and were vulnerable to homelessness and exploitation.

2. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the committee were:

'In the context of the State's commitment under the EU Recast Reception Conditions Directive, and the presenting pressures on the direct provision system, a committee is being established to:

- (i) Consider contingency options for the management of applicants for international protection should the volume exceed the International Protection Accommodation Service's capacity to implement options (including BREXIT related movement) in the context of the standards required by the Directive;
- (ii) Consider the short-to-medium term options which could be implemented in addition to, or in replacement of, the existing system to meet the compliance standards of the Directive;
- (iii) To review the implementation by all parties of the State's obligations under the EU Directive'.

3. Executive Summary and Recommendations

Executive Summary

The Group reviewed the system of provision of State services to applicants for international protection, known as direct provision, and noted that:

- Ireland has international legal obligations to accept persons who claim international protection. Under the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive, it is obliged to offer certain State supports to individuals who claim international protection, and to assess those persons for vulnerability. At present those requirements are being met through the direct provision system.
- Based on experience over the last 20 years, migratory pressures make it likely that Ireland will continue to experience some thousands of people voluntarily presenting and seeking international protection every year. There have been substantial increases in rates of persons presenting over the last 3 years. For planning purposes DJE will use the 2019 figures as a base and plan for scenarios of a 10 per cent and 20 per cent increase per annum with regular 6 monthly reviews to be undertaken.
- There is a potential impact on numbers arriving to Ireland following the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. However the specific effects on migration flows is as yet unclear, and may be difficult to distinguish from other effects driving migration flows, such as conflicts abroad or economic pressures within other States. However, it would be prudent to prepare contingency plans for possible increases in applicants for international protection coming to Ireland who have diverted from the United Kingdom.
- The current system of provision of State services called direct provision has ensured, for an initial period, the accommodation of, and access to necessary State services for over 60,000 people seeking international protection since 2000. The system was put in place in order to ensure that people did not experience homelessness and can gain access to basic State services upon arrival in the State. It also ensures that the majority of applicants for protection are not generally competing with others (Irish, EEA and foreign nationals with immigration permission) for housing within the initial period of their residence in the State. There is no obligation on protection applicants to accept state services.

- Recent requirements to improve standards (as recommended in the McMahon Report) and to shorten the periods of consideration of applications have improved the experience of applicants. However, the system has been the subject of sustained public criticism about the reliance on a model of procurement of accommodation from the private sector, about standards within centres and the length of time people reside in the centres. The criticism is unlikely to abate in the short term despite those improvements. That criticism, allied with complaints about lack of public disclosure and consultation during the procurement process and concerns for competition between local residents and occupants of centres for public services such as education and primary health care, particularly where a community believe that too large a group of additional residents to easily absorb will be located in their community, is underpinning public opposition to the opening of some new accommodation centres.
- The system of directly providing State supports such as accommodation, and health supports, and of registering applicants for protection in respect of the relevant social welfare supports and into local schools, has been under significant strain since September 2018, as the existing network of centres reached capacity. This had led to applicants being offered accommodation in a relatively unplanned way through the emergency use of existing or former tourist facilities at much higher cost to the Exchequer. This also brings greater risks that Ireland will not meet its wider obligations under the Recast Reception Conditions Directive, than if persons were placed in more permanent facilities.
- There are benefits to applicants being accommodated in a State facility for a period, and for many State services, it is more efficient to provide those services to a larger group of people in a fixed place. Retaining this model of accommodation can only be justified to the public if there is an efficient process of consideration of applications that helps those who are subsequently granted protection status or permission to remain to integrate swiftly and for those who are not successful in their claims to exit the system in an orderly manner.
- The policy on how, and for how long, the State provides State services (reception accommodation, food, health provision, etc.) directly for persons in the protection process has not to date been reviewed in light of the ability of persons in the international protection application process to access the labour market and secure their own resources to

live in the community. It is considered that the policy should be focussed on enabling persons to integrate into broader Irish society at an earlier stage. Should applicants receive a negative decision such an approach will assist in re-integration on their return. The ability for persons to be accommodated in State provided accommodation will need to take into account how the State's obligations can best be met under the Recast Reception Conditions Directive.

The IDG noted the Minister for Justice and Equality's establishment of an Advisory Group. The group is charged with considering 'Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process' and will have the following role:

- To advise on the development of a long-term approach to the provision of support including accommodation to persons in the international protection process;
- To identify good practice in European countries in the provision of supports to persons within the international protection process, particularly dealing with variations in demand;
- To set out a process for achieving the long term approach to supporting persons in the international protection process.

The Inter-Departmental Group made the following recommendations:

Procurement of Accommodation:

- Short-term and medium-term changes to the model of accommodation procurement and service delivery must be considered so that the system can meet anticipated demand over the coming years. Consideration should be given to moving to a more mixed model of provision including a greater reliance on accommodation provided on State owned or leased land which would give a greater level of security to the State that it can meet its ongoing EU legal obligations under the Recast Reception Conditions Directive in respect of all voluntary presentations. The pressures currently on the system may require such solutions to be brought forward at an early stage.
- As it is more effective for the State to plan and provide necessary services to applicants for international protection when they are congregated for an initial period, the system should be structured around a small number of

short-stay reception and screening centres (modelled on the current single reception centre in North Dublin), following which applicants will be transferred to one of a smaller number of permanent State-provided or leased accommodation centres. These centres should ideally be located close to large population centres where availability of other State services and work opportunities (for those entitled to work) may be greater.

- Based on initial vulnerability assessments, individuals would be offered targeted public services within those centres as appropriate to their assessed needs.
- The DJE, working with the Office of Government Procurement, relevant local authorities, and other land procurement agencies, should explore how such sites can be provided and construction of necessary facilities procured over the next 2 years.
- However some capacity to procure additional space on an ongoing basis from the private sector should be retained to ensure that the system has some flexibility to expand or contract in line with demand.
- In the light of current demands for accommodation and to enable a move away from emergency accommodation as quickly as possible, consideration should also be given to contracting service providers to provide modular accommodation on existing locations to meet immediate demands. Such accommodation could be funded by engaging in contracts with existing service providers. This recommendation should be pursued as part of a range of urgent measures, including sourcing new centres of accommodation, reducing processing times, including accelerated procedures for safe country of origin applicants and measures to move persons with status to mainstream housing.
- The need to engage with local communities on the opening of new centres is important, both to obtain community support and to avoid inaccurate information being circulated thus creating unnecessary fears in communities. While there is a tension between, on the one hand, the need to conclude contracts before formal announcements can be made and, on the other hand, the need for early engagement, a standard approach and communications package will be prepared and published so that any community will have details of how State services will engage with communities and how the needs of both the local community and the applicants in the centres will be met. In addition, specific engagement with

communities, including options for community gain will be open for discussion with individual communities when a centre is planned.

- An Inter-departmental Community Engagement Group should be established to devise and implement an effective engagement strategy focused on the opening of new centres.
- The DJE and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) should engage on how such a reorientation of accommodation procurement should be funded, and the potential sources of funding for same. Access to EU sources of funding should be explored in this regard. The key objective is to provide capacity to move away as soon as possible from emergency accommodation which is the least efficient way of meeting the needs of the applicants and the most expensive.
- Persons assessed as more vulnerable should be accommodated in smaller or more bespoke arrangements better fitted to meet what can be more complex or overlapping needs. The DJE should explore what may be the best model to provide that type of accommodation with bodies, including charitable bodies, equipped to handle complex personal and housing needs and supports.
- All centres, regardless of the model of provision, should meet the recently adopted National Standards for Accommodation.

International Protection Process:

- The DJE should continue to seek to achieve greater efficiencies in the process of considering applications for international protection, with a view of achieving first instance decisions on all applications within a median processing time of 9 months and with the further objective of reducing this to 6 months. This is dependent on future demand and will require an injection of processing resources. It was noted, however, that even if those goals are achieved, persons who appeal or judicially review first instance decisions will as a result spend longer in the application process.
- The DJE should continue to review its arrangements for initial processing of international protection applicants, including; decentralisation of interviews, use of video conferencing facilities for carrying out interviews, introduction of accelerated procedures for applicants from Safe Countries of Origin, and streamlining of processing including at the stage final decisions issued by the Ministerial Decision Unit. The International

Protection Appeals Tribunal should also continue to streamline its processes.

- The DJE and the DEASP should continue to work jointly to streamline the issue of Temporary Residence Cards and the allocation of a PPSN number for new applicants.

Vulnerability Assessments:

- The procedures to meet the requirements under the Directive with regard to vulnerability assessments should be enhanced by:
 - The DJE carrying out an initial basic assessment of vulnerability at the initial stage of applications for international protection;
 - The HSE, in respect of the health aspects through the proffered health screening and ongoing medical supports;
 - Vulnerabilities identified, either at the initial screening or subsequently¹, are communicated to the relevant authorities;
 - Arrangements put in place to permit the necessary exchange of information between State entities in relation to the vulnerability assessments, to ensure a coordinated approach to the necessary provision of services. It is noted that State services in this case, when available to persons in the international protection process, are accessed in the same way as Irish citizens, so normal prioritisation, access criteria and waiting times will generally apply.

Managing of state services to applicants during the process:

- It is recommended, in order to ensure more seamless management of provision of State services to persons in the international protection process, and in addition to the DES official already seconded to the DJE, officials from key services (HSE, Tusla, including Tusla Educational Welfare Services/TESS, local government sector) be assigned to work within the Department's International Protections Accommodation Service.
- The DJE should adopt an appropriate case management system for the delivery of State services to ensure that persons who avail of State

¹ Eg by centre managers, GPs, NGOs, reception officers etc.

provided accommodation are appropriately managed at all points in the process. The system should have provision to record PPSN's to assist in the delivery of services.

Better provision for children:

- As new accommodation centres are identified, and once the numbers and age ranges of the children are identified, the DES will ensure that:
 - Where the increase in the numbers of students entitles the school to an additional teaching allocation, this will be provided as soon as possible;
 - Where the enrolment of the children resident in the State provided accommodation Centre entitles the school to an additional teaching allocation for English as an Additional Language (EAL), this will be provided as soon as possible;
 - Where the increased enrolment requires an increase in the school's special educational needs teacher profile, they will receive, as soon as possible, 5 additional Special Education Teaching hours for every 25 additional pupils who are enrolled, or a proportion of five hours if less than 25 where the number of pupils enrolling to the school has a material impact on the school's allocation (5 pupils or more);
 - Additional SNA provision for pupils who have been assessed as having significant additional care needs. This is currently contingent upon assessments being carried out. In the event of a new school profiled SNA model being introduced from September 2020, it will be based on a review of the schools profile.
- Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) is responsible for assisting with school enrolment and attendance.
- Tusla will work with the DJE, through co-location of a member of Tusla Protection and Welfare Service staff to:
 - Review current information sharing pathways to ensure all children, in emergency and State provided accommodation, are aware of and receive timely services;

- Make arrangements for sharing of information between DJE and the National Children and Young People's Services Committees Steering Group to be put in place to ensure that the needs of residents in DJE accommodation are included in the Children and Young People's Plan for each area;
- Coordinate matters around children's welfare both in relation to moving families from emergency accommodation to DJE centres (or between centres) and when they are granted status and move out of DJE accommodation. This includes liaison with Tusla and Tusla funded services, including Child and Family Services Networks and Children and Young People's Services Committees. In addition, there are 121 Tusla funded Family Resource Centres across the country. These are walk-in services, i.e. a referral is not required, and open to all families living in the area, including those in DJE accommodation.

Access to health services:

- The Department of Health and the HSE commit to the following actions to provide health services for international protection applicants:
 - Provision of primary care services to meet the health needs of international, protection applicants, through existing mainstream services, including primary care (GPs and nurses), dental and mental health services;
 - Secondment of a HSE staff member to a national coordination team located in the DJE;
 - Expansion of the initial health screening service in the National Reception centre, Baleskin, so that residents can be safely dispersed to accommodation centres.
- The DJE and the HSE should work jointly to streamline the issue of medical cards for new applicants. This can be impacted by delays in the issuing of Temporary Residence Cards and the allocation of PPSN numbers. This issue was considerably exacerbated due to pressure of space at the State Reception Centre in Belsekin, which meant that applicants were accommodated directly in emergency accommodation. The system is now stabilised with new applicants processed through Belsekin and the IPO and DEASP are working closely together to coordinate procedures.

Access to the labour market

- Given that access to the labour market has now been operating for over a year, the DJE should review in Q1 2020 the impact of this change in policy and how it has been applied, to ensure that it properly fulfils its objectives under the Directive and that persons are fully encouraged to access mainstream employment once they acquire access to the labour market. While not pre-empting the outcome of such a review, consideration should be given to revisiting the period within which people applying for international protection secure access to the labour market, with a view to reducing it to 6 months or less in appropriate circumstances, so as to ensure their earlier full integration into Irish society and securing, through employment, the resources to leave the State supported system of accommodation and services. The duration of the permission should also be extended from 6 months to one year.
- The DJE should review the State services provided to persons with access to the labour market, and introduce charges for or withdrawal of ancillary services, once persons have adequate resources to provide for themselves.
- Relevant Departments should ensure that policies in relation to applicants for international protection take account of the broader implications for access to wider State services for persons still in the international protection process having lawful access to the labour market.
- The DEASP should, in addition to providing asylum seekers with access to employers who are seeking workers through linking with Intreo, serve as the primary route for advice on employability and for referral to appropriate education and training and employment schemes.

Enabling people to leave State supported accommodation

- Once people acquire a legal right to remain in the State, they should be supported to leave State provided accommodation in the shortest possible timeframe consistent with transition to the mainstream housing market. The DJE, working alongside the local authorities and relevant non-Governmental actors, will work jointly to help persons source and move into alternative accommodation. In order to ensure sufficient capacity in State provided accommodation a minimum of 1,200 persons per year are likely to receive a permission to remain in the State, and will need to be accommodated in the mainstream housing

market in order to ensure sufficient capacity in State provided accommodation.

- As a support to the aim of assisting people to integrate quickly into broader society, the DJE, in consultation in some cases with the DEASP, should examine mechanisms under which persons who remain in State accommodation for more than 12 weeks, after receipt of a decision for permission to remain, have certain ancillary free State supports withdrawn or are required to make a contribution towards the cost of their accommodation and ancillary services. This will require careful consideration, taking into account the individual circumstances in each case, and also taking into account vulnerabilities and special needs, particularly in relation to families.
- DPER is exploring with the Department of Finance how the existing Rent-a-Room Tax Relief could potentially provide an accommodation route for those residents in State provided accommodation who receive a positive Decision to Remain.
- The DJE should explore the potential for bodies such as MABS and Citizen Information Board to provide support to residents as they move from IPAS accommodation into the community.
- A coordinated approach between relevant agencies should be put in place to facilitate the movement of small number of persons with complex and overlapping needs, who need particular support, from State supported accommodation. The local authority social assessment process will facilitate the identification of appropriate accommodation requirements.
- The DJE will put in place appropriate management of the accommodation and other State services provided in respect of persons refused permission to remain in the State, so that they are encouraged to repatriate voluntarily.

Contingency planning for numbers arriving:

- The DJE should, as a matter of urgency, prepare a contingency plan to manage a major expansion of numbers applying for international protection and seeking State accommodation, supports and services over a short period of time, in collaboration with relevant national and local authorities and relevant non-Governmental bodies. The plan

should identify how and where large groups of people could be accommodated over a short period and what the regulatory and other responses to that situation should be.

- The DJE should maintain a capacity to access emergency accommodation on an ongoing basis in order to ensure that surges in numbers applying for State services can be accommodated.

Governance:

- A high level inter-Departmental group, with representation at senior decision making level for every sector involved, and chaired by the DJE, should manage and monitor the implementation of this report on the system of State supports for applicants for international protection and to ensure service pressures are being addressed around the provided accommodation centres. In addition the group will be tasked with monitoring and managing an agreed and coordinated approach to ensure contingency plans are established, resourced and in place to respond to the risk of significant numbers of new applicants arriving in the State in a short period.
- The existing inter-Departmental group, in place to manage operational matters and chaired by DJE, will continue to operate but be strengthened to ensure each key Department and agency is represented (including but not restricted to HSE, DEASP, DES, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG), DCYA and Tusla) and to enhance its community, public and political engagement role.

4. Overview of Direct Provision

A dramatic rise in the number of international protection applications was seen in Ireland in the late 1990s. This led to the establishment of a new system of providing services directly to applicants for asylum on a non-statutory basis in 2000. Accommodation, food, laundry and other services were provided under contracts awarded by the DJE, and other mainstream services were provided by relevant Government Departments.

In 2015, Judge Bryan McMahon completed an extensive review report titled the 'Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers' (the McMahon Report). This report guided the work of the State in improving the international protection process and the model of direct provision thereafter. The process of implementing the recommendations set down by the McMahon report, in particular those requiring "independent living" has resulted in significant changes and improvements to the accommodation and food services supplied to many living within the State supported housing services, with the intention of all centres providing independent living facilities by 2020. Some other key recommendations in the McMahon report that have been implemented include access to the labour market, access to the Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Children by persons in centres, increases in daily allowances, etc.

The decision by Government to opt into the Reception Conditions Directive (which was transposed into Irish law on the 30th of June 2018 by way of the European Communities [Reception Conditions] Regulations 2018) has major implications. It places a statutory obligation on the State to provide services to applicants including laying down the standards for the reception of international protection applicants.

The Regulations also made specific provision that persons who have been waiting more than nine months for a first instance decision can apply for access to the labour market. This came into force on 30 June 2018.

The decision by Ireland to opt into the Directive is a significant and positive measure, not only in addressing the matter of labour market access, but also extending to children's rights, rights for unaccompanied minors, vulnerable people, new appeals processes, healthcare and education and training provision. It places the provision of accommodation and related services on a statutory footing for the first time.

Published in August 2019, new National Standards for Accommodation, drawn up by a committee including relevant NGOs, will meet the standards set out in the Directive and Guidance on Reception Conditions from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) once in force.

Service Provision

Under the EU Recast Reception Conditions Directive, an applicant has an entitlement to material reception conditions where he or she does not have sufficient means to have an adequate standard of living. SI 230 of 2018 defines material reception conditions as:

- Housing, food and associated benefits provided in kind;
- a daily expense allowance;
- and clothing provided by way of financial allowance under section 201 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005.

Once a person makes an application for international protection the applicant has a right to material reception conditions until they have completed the international protection process. Entitlement to material reception conditions is subject to the applicant residing in a designated accommodation centre.

Accommodation

The DJE offers applicants, who are unable to provide for themselves, full board accommodation in accommodation centres and certain ancillary services while their applications are being processed. It is a way of meeting the basic needs of food and shelter while their applications are being decided upon. All eligible international protection applicants are offered accommodation following the submission of their application but there is no legal requirement for them to accept it. An international protection applicant who avails of accommodation may leave it at any time and a person who does not accept the initial offer may change their mind subsequently. Accommodation centres are located around Ireland, and include former hotels, guesthouses, hostels, and apartments. All centres are operated under commercial contracts by private sector companies. A small number of the centres are State owned. Each centre is safe and secure while regular meals are provided along with other services such as laundry, etc.

Education

If an international protection applicant has children between the ages of 6 and 16, the child must attend school or otherwise receive an education, similar to all other children resident in Ireland. All immigrant children, including unaccompanied minors and children of international protection applicants, can access free mainstream education system at primary and post-primary level in a manner similar to Irish nationals. Primary and post-primary education is free

although some payments may be needed from time-to-time. Access for eligible international protection applicants to the majority of further education and training programmes is free of charge, including English language supports. While international fees continue to apply for Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programmes and higher education courses, supports for Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and Higher Education undergraduate courses are in place for qualifying students under the Pilot Student Support Scheme².

There are agreed processes in place arising from the opening of a new accommodation centre where children of school going age will be accommodated. The DES has an official seconded to the DJE who, in conjunction with the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS), can proactively engage with local schools where children are likely to seek school places. The aim is to engage as early as possible, once the contractual arrangements are put in place. This official works closely with the Education Welfare Service, TESS, whose role is to assist with the enrolment of children in schools and with school attendance issues. A meeting is arranged where the schools can raise any issues and where they are advised on additional resources that they are eligible for arising from the enrolment of these pupils.

Schools can be advised that, as with any other child/young person transitioning into a new setting, they will need to take time to allow the child/young person to orientate themselves and settle into their new school using the existing structures to welcome any new student. Some of these children/young people have experience of being a pupil in an Irish school and where appropriate any existing Student Support File should be made available to the new school (with parental/guardian consent). This will allow the school to consider how best to support any additional needs in the context of the Continuum of Support if appropriate. If the principal of a receiving school has specific concerns, or requires some advice in relation to observed needs they may consult their assigned National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist.

It should be noted that neither the DJE nor the DES, has access to the previous formal education of individual children prior to their arrival in this State. A small number of children are identified i.e. following health screening in Baleskin Reception Centre, as having special needs. The parents/guardians are advised to request a referral for an 'Assessment of Needs' from their

² The pilot scheme is available to prospective PLC and undergraduate students but not postgraduate students.

doctor in instances where they do not have any supporting background documentation from their country of origin.

It is difficult to be precise on the time frame within which additional resources can be made available. However, there are well established open lines of communication between both Departments and with key players in the DES in order to ensure we are responsive to schools.

Third level education supports for qualifying students are also in place under the Pilot Student Support Scheme. The scheme, which was introduced in 2015 with eligibility rules broadened in 2019, provides supports in line with the current Student Grant Scheme to eligible school leavers who are in the broad international protection system (other than those at the deportation order stage).

In relation to transport services, under current contracts Service Providers must meet the reasonable transport needs of the residents. This has meant where suitable public transport is not in place the centres provide transport, e.g daily buses to the nearest urban centre. This requirement has been revised and clarified in the new tender process and the bidders must include a transport plan where a centre is more than 2 km from local services, i.e. school, post office, medical centre, bank, etc. In relation to emergency accommodation locations, the transport needs are considered at each location and transport is provided as necessary, e.g in the absence of public transport.

Legal Support

International protection applicants can access legal assistance from the Legal Aid Board (LAB) to help with their application or appeals and may be given other services based on their needs.

Social Welfare

The DEASP is responsible the payment of the Daily Expenses Allowance. Since March 2019, each adult receives €38.80 per week while each child receives €29.80 per week.

In addition, the DEASP under the Exceptional Needs Payment (ENPs) scheme, provides financial assistance to applicants to meet costs that that they may be unable to meet from the weekly allowance. ENPs paid to persons in the State provided accommodation system are largely towards clothing costs, transport costs to necessary appointments and child related items such as prams/buggies. Protection applicants placed in emergency accommodation

locations, have also received Exceptional Needs Payments (ENPs) to meet costs of necessary items that are provided within the accommodation centres, but are not available within the emergency locations.

Applicants can also qualify for a Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance which is a payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of clothing and footwear when children start or re-commence school each autumn.

Health

The current policy is that primary healthcare services are provided to persons in the protection process on the same basis as Irish nationals. A person seeking international protection can apply for and be assessed for a medical card. This includes medical prescriptions, dental care, optician care, pregnancy services and children's health.

The Department of Health and the HSE work closely to address the immediate health needs of persons in the State provided accommodation system. The role of the health services is very broad and includes:

- health screening,
- primary care services,
- medical cards,
- hospital services,
- specialised services for people who have experienced torture or trauma, etc.

The Baleskin Reception Centre is the only dedicated, static, health screening centre for refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland; there are small amounts of resources available in Cork and the Midlands to support permanent centres. Health screening is a critical public health measure and provides an early assessment of vulnerability. HSE Dublin North City and County provides a multidisciplinary health screening team to assess and address the immediate health needs of newly arrived residents, including child health and referrals to specialist services. Recently, a new primary care centre has been built in the Baleskin Reception Centre. The Mobile Health Screening Unit, operated on behalf of the HSE by Safetynet, offers health screening to a number of applicants who have not previously availed of health screening.

A person seeking international protection can apply for and be assessed for a medical card. Orientation is provided to all applicants in Baleskin Reception Centre which is tailored to meet the short term needs of the residents,

including advising of and aiding with obtaining their entitlements, such as medical cards.

Voluntary medical screening is provided to all IP applicants in Baleskin. It had been the case over the past year that some IP applicants were accommodated initially in emergency accommodation with screening offered by SafetyNet at most locations. This presented challenges with the medical card assessment process. However, IPAS has now returned to the process where currently all IP applicants are being initially accommodated in Baleskin, thereafter being accommodated at either a centre or emergency accommodation location. This ensures no delays in the offer of screening and medical card assessments.

Supporting Health and Wellbeing

Healthy Ireland is the Government-led initiative to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Ireland. Healthy Ireland seeks to address the social, environmental and commercial determinants of health which adversely impact on health outcomes, give rise to health inequalities and create barriers for people and communities to enjoy optimal health. Taking an inclusive, whole-of-society partnership approach and empowering people and communities to respond to the challenges that affect health and wellbeing in their own communities, is key to implementation of Healthy Ireland.

Healthy Ireland also seeks to support individuals, families and communities to improve their health through positive lifestyle behaviours (healthy eating, physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, addressing tobacco, alcohol and substance use, sexual health, and maintaining positive mental wellbeing) which can impact on the risk of developing chronic disease such as diabetes, heart disease, some cancers and dementia, and affect quality of life.

The HSE and other partners at national and local level, including in partnership with local authorities, provide a range of services, programmes and initiatives to support people and communities in their health and wellbeing. These can include activities specifically targeting marginalised groups, as well as inclusive activities supporting enhanced integration and connection at local level.

5. Statistical Information and Context

(a) Numbers in State provided accommodation

International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) is currently accommodating 7,575 international protection applicants. This represents a 26.3% increase year to date. The rate of arrival has exceeded DJE's ability to accommodate all applicants in accommodation centres. At present 6,051 applicants are accommodated in DJE's 39 centres and a further 1,523 are accommodated in 37 emergency accommodation locations spread across 17 counties. Current indications are that the rate of new applicants is increasing.

The pressures on the system since September 2018 has meant that applicants in emergency accommodation continues to increase as reflected in the following tables and graphs:

Figure 1

Total Number of Persons managed by DJE			
	October 27th 2019	December 30 th 2018	Percentage Change
Total Number of persons being managed by DJE in 39 Centres (in 19 Counties)	7,529	6,115	23%
Contracted Capacity in DJE Accommodation Centres ³	6,408	6,133	4.5%
Emergency accommodation 37 Emergency Accommodation Locations (in 17 Counties)	1,439	219	557%
Movement of Persons (1st January to 31st October) 2018/2019			
	2019	2018	Percentage Change
New Asylum Applications – IPO	4,189	2,726	53.7%
New Applications from Safe Countries ⁴	1,852	872	112.4%

³ Additional accommodation was identified in St Patrick's Monaghan, Millstreet and Baleskin centres. However, the closure of Hatch Hall and loss of 220 bed spaces negated those gains.

⁴ Georgia, Albania and South Africa.

New Applicants into State provided accommodation	3,367	2,079	62%
% of new IPO Applicants entering State provided accommodation	80.4%	76.3%	-
Number of persons who left State provided accommodation from 1 st of January to 31 st October 2018/2019	1,859	1,342	(38.4%)
(Monthly total move-ons - assisted and non-assisted to end October 2019)			
Persons with status residing in centres at the end of October 2019 ⁵	860	13.4% of Total Capacity (6,408)	
Persons with status who moved into the community from 1 st to 31 st October 2019	117		
Persons with status who moved into the community from 1 st Jan to 31 st October 2019	682		

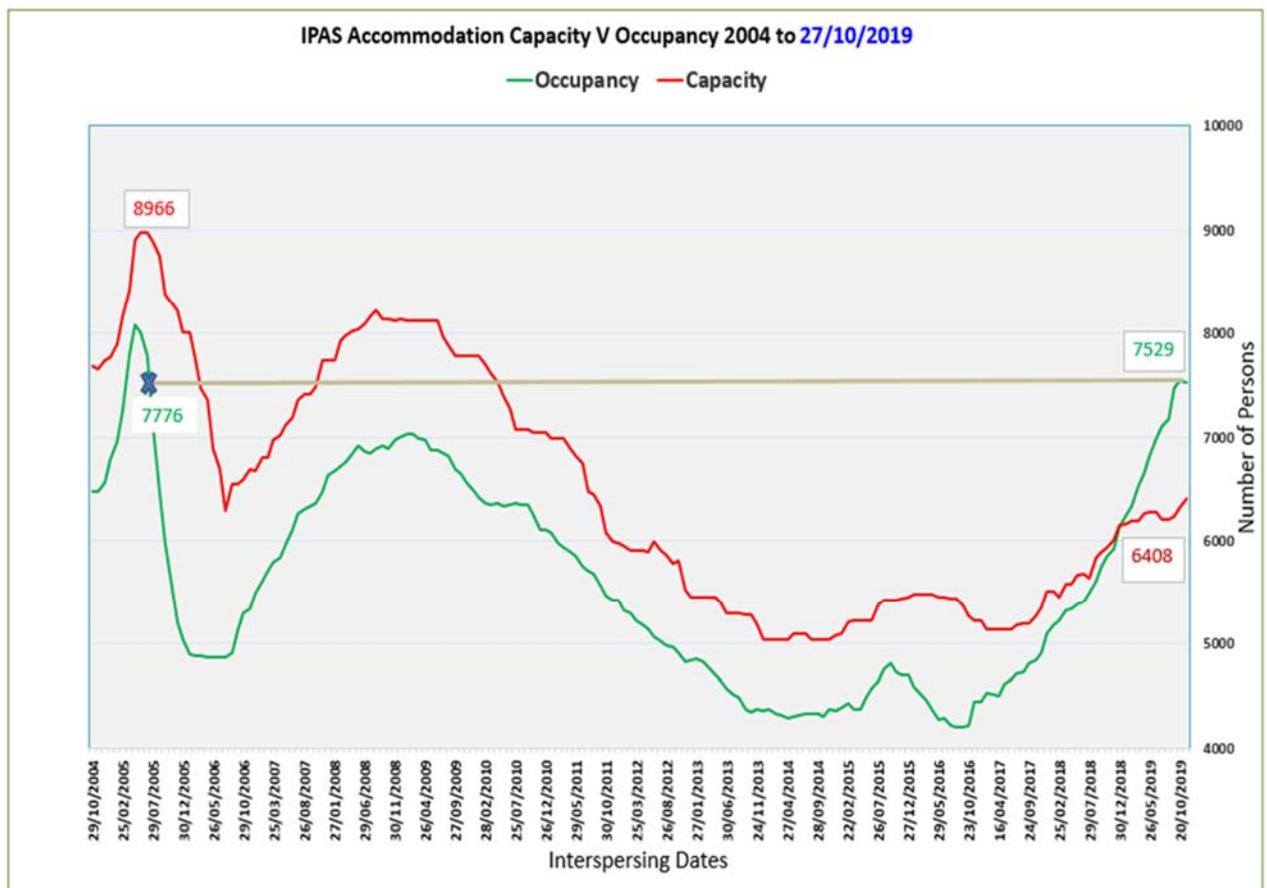
It is clear from the figures that the difference between the figures for new arrivals versus the numbers who left DP in the same period (over 1,000) has put major strains in the system and a range of solutions will be required to address this.

Figure 2

Monthly Totals for assisted move-ons with status to end October 2019				
Partner Organisation	De Paul Ireland	Peter McVerry Trust	Jesuit Refugee Service	Total
1 st to the 31 st October 2019	43	52	0	95
1 st of January 2019 to the 30 th 31 st October 2019	273	160	23	456

⁵ While the number has dropped recently, it will rise to over 1,000 as further cases in the pipeline are processed in the coming weeks.

Figure 3



The following table shows a high level analysis of persons in State Accommodation. The figures change on a continual basis as people move in/out of the system and as their status changes though the application determination process.

Figure 4

Status of persons in State Accommodation	Number of persons
In the application process	6,609
Received a Permission to Remain	770
Subject of a Deportation Order	83
Total	7,462

(b) Numbers of applications for international protection

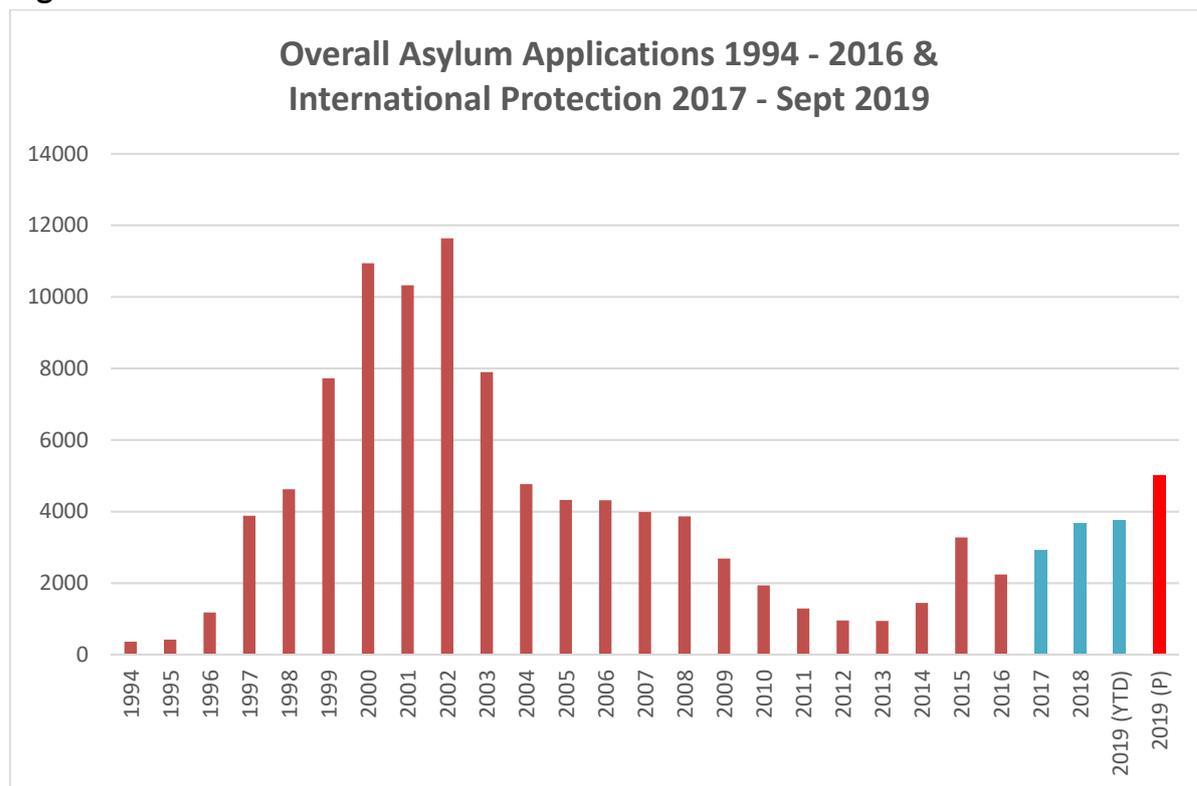
There has been a significant upward trend of new applications over the period 2017 to date with the rate of increase in applications accelerating. The most prominent increase is in applications from safe countries of origin of Albania and Georgia (and to a lesser degree South Africa). These three countries make up 44% of all applications this year (and account for 38.4% of applications for October 2019 alone).

(i) Application trends and projections:

There is an increase of 39% in overall applications to end of October compared with the same period in 2018. When relocation applications are excluded, the figure is up 54 per cent. The number of new applications is projected to be in the region of 5,000 this year (although this may be somewhat less as figures are stabilising in the past few weeks).

While this figure (as set out in the graph below) is significantly less than the years with the highest numbers of applications in the early 2000's, the projected figures for this year will be at the highest level since 2003. There are also differing environmental and climate factors in existence today that are putting increasing pressure on the system and which require different solutions to be put in place, particularly over the coming months and into 2020. Therefore, more long-term considerations are being considered by the recently established Advisory Group chaired by Catherine Day.

Figure 5



Future projections are extremely difficult to predict and can be influenced by a range of factors, including the economic climate, migration crises (particularly in specific countries where some links may already exist to Ireland), national and EU policies in relation to both legal and illegal migration, etc. Separately, the impact of BREXIT at time of writing is an unknown factor. For planning purposes, at the very minimum it would be prudent to assume the existing level of applications will continue and that additional provision needs to be made for a further 10 to 20 per cent increase in applications for the coming years.

(ii) Processing times and volumes:

One of the factors that impacts on accommodation capacity is the time spent by applicants in the application process. This period of time is generally comprised of:

- Processing time to first instance recommendation/decision;
- Processing time for any appeals taken;
- Processing time for issuing of the Decisions by the Ministerial Decision Unit;
- Any Judicial Reviews to the High Court and Appeals;

- Length of time from grant of status to move to permanent accommodation;
- Length of time from making of a Deportation Order to the person leaving the accommodation centre.

In respect of the application processing times for first instance and appeals, the median processing times are as follows:

Figure 6

First Instance: Median processing times for Post Commencement Cases (application date to determination date) at end September, 2019 were	
Case Type	Months
Priority Cases	8.9
Safe Country of Origin	9.4
All other cases	17
Overall	17

These processing times have been maintained at last year's levels through a series of measures notwithstanding the increase in new applications that require initial processing. First instance decisions (including Dublin Convention, Permission to Remain Reviews and refugee determination) are expected to reach around over 4,500 in 2019 compared to 3,800 in 2018.

In respect of appeals of first instance decisions the current processing times stands at 33 weeks. Through a series of measures the processing time for appeals received in 2019 and processed this year has reduced to 16 weeks. This is coming close to the 14 weeks processing time target.

Processing times for issue of final decisions by the Ministerial Decision Unit lengthened in the first half of this year, however, a series of measures undertaken by the DJE is reducing this to a number of weeks. This stage of the process arises because as provided for in the IP Act, the IPO issues a recommendation rather than a decision with the final decision being taken by the Minister. At this stage final checks are carried out including updating of information on file if there is a significant period of time since it was first obtained, such as Garda related information.

Regarding persons with Deportation Orders (DOs), a recent analysis showed a total of 264 orders against persons accommodated in centres or 3.5 per cent

of total capacity. These fall into two broad categories, split roughly 50:50 – those who have DOs that are enforceable and those that are not enforceable at the current time. The majority of these DOs have been issued within the previous 6 months.

A detailed analysis to determine the reasons why a DO cannot be served at this time has also been undertaken. The reasons include: cases that are subject to a Judicial Review; families with children in schools; a family member still in the process; difficulties with obtaining travel documents, etc. Wherever possible, DOs are enforced - many choose to leave voluntarily with a smaller number of DOs enforced by the Garda National Immigration Bureau who use a mix of scheduled and chartered flights.

Persons with DOs continue to be actively managed and while every effort continues to be made to reduce the timeframe from final decision to deportation for persons staying in DP after an order is made, there is relatively limited capacity for improvement in this area.

6. Challenges within the system

Rate of new presentations

The DJE is accommodating 6,052 people in its 39 accommodation centres and a further 1,523 people are in 37 emergency accommodation locations, in hotels and guesthouses, spread over 17 counties. To date in 2019 the rate of new applicants has increased by some 53.7%, building on a 20% rise in numbers during 2018. This, allied with delays in persons with status vacating accommodation and the time taken to procure additional accommodation that meets the new standards, has led to significant pressure on the available accommodation. The inability to procure sufficient new accommodation in order to respond to those requiring accommodation is placing a significant pressure on the Department.

BREXIT

Some part of the ongoing increase in the rate of new presentations may be BREXIT related. Measures are being taken to assess the trends in rates of arrivals and, in as much as possible, to ascertain the routes by which applicants came to Ireland. Contingencies to respond to a potentially significant rate of increased numbers arriving in Ireland due to BREXIT are difficult to establish, particularly given the pressures on the existing health and accommodation provision systems.

Persons with Status or Permission to Remain

Coupled with an increase in the number of people applying for protection in recent years there are a large number of people with an international protection status or a permission to remain who continue to live in DJE accommodation. This figure is currently 860 people, representing 13.4% of the total accommodation capacity within DJE centres and while it has reduced somewhat, by early October it is expected to rise to over 1,000 as further cases are processed through the system.

People with status or permission to remain have the same access to mainstream housing supports and services as nationals. However, the increased demand for accommodation within the State's growing population, and the absence of sufficient accommodation, is also creating a challenge as persons with status are often unable to leave the State provided accommodation system within a reasonable period of time. In that regard, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government supplied figures regarding housing needs in wider society, to the effect that there are over 68,000 households on local authority waiting lists for social housing, as well as over 10,000 individuals accessing homeless services.

Applicants opting for accommodation in State provided accommodation

Since September 2017, the percentage of international protection applicants seeking to enter the State provided accommodation system has increased to over 80 per cent. Current trends indicate that this pattern is intensifying and that the percentage increase in the number of applicants for State provided accommodation services is growing. At the same time, the available supply of suitable centre-based accommodation is contracting due to a number of factors including the increased growth of the Irish economy, the growth of the tourism industry and consequential demand for additional hotel capacity and the increased demand for accommodation for homeless persons.

Procurement model

Under the procurement model a public call for accommodation is issued. People with premises in local communities decide to offer that premises to the Department. Hence the offer comes from a person living in and/or with business interests in a locality. Premises submitted under the tendering process are subject to independent assessment by the Office of Government Procurement. It is not possible to discuss business matters submitted under the tendering process with third parties until signed contracts are in place. It is not possible for third parties to influence the outcomes of a public tender process. Additionally, this model of procurement of private accommodation, whereby communities may only become aware of a new centre opening in the days/week leading up to the opening, remains unpopular and may not be in keeping with effective integration practice. The lack of advance community engagement frequently results in a negative reaction from communities, often in circumstances where the concerns may be unwarranted (e.g. access to school places, access to primary care, etc.).

There is a need to consider the capacity of local community services to support a new centre if negative reactions from a community are to be minimised. At an early stage, there is a need to engage with public services providers, such as education and health, to ensure service deficits in a local community are identified and considered and appropriate responses are put in place. A small level of additionality, through a form of community gain in local service provision or facilities, may go some way to addressing concerns.

That said, it is often the adjustment to the arrival of new communities that is the challenge for existing communities to embrace, and one which may benefit from greater input at the planning/communication phase of the procurement process. Indeed, for some smaller communities, the arrival of new members to the community may support teacher ratios and bring new energy into local sport clubs and community activities.

Therefore, the risk of heightened opposition to the opening of the necessary accommodation in a community, evidenced by protests and even premises being damaged, must be carefully balanced with the ability to inform communities in advance. Experience to date suggests that opposition to a centre opening falls away once the centre opens and support groups, including Friends of the Centre, are established. However, there is certainly a risk that opposition can increase still further.

Use of Emergency Accommodation

The IDG noted that the use of emergency accommodation is sub-optimal, both from the perspective of applicants and of State agencies. It inhibits the ability of the DJE and partner Departments and agencies to engage with applicants and thereby respond to presenting needs. This is particularly the case in relation to health where the placement of protection applicants in emergency beds can put additional stresses on extremely limited local services and frustrate health screening and medical card provision.

Processes for the issue of Temporary Residents Cards and PPSNs, without which the applicant is not entitled to the Daily Expenses Allowance, do not work as smoothly as when persons are processed through the Reception Centre. Education provision is also disrupted as it is not possible to predict the length of stay in the location. In general, the use of emergency accommodation has placed additional pressures on the provision of services to persons in the protection process. Those in emergency accommodation move to DJE accommodation centres once places become available, however, the extra move may require health and education services to provide access to services and school places in different locations.

The DJE's aim is to reduce the number of persons in emergency accommodation as quickly as possible. However, until such time as sufficient permanent accommodation to meet demand has been secured, there will continue to be an obligation to use emergency beds. To improve service delivery the Department is currently creating specific locations for families within its emergency bed portfolio. It is also liaising with partner departments to overcome the challenges faced in service delivery to applicants in this situation, e.g. Daily Expenses Allowance and health care provision. The Department has also contracted the Jesuit Refugee Service to undertake a visiting support and cultural liaison service to persons resident in emergency accommodation in Dublin and the north-east regions. The service has the role of identifying the needs of residents in emergency accommodation and of

linking residents with services where such linkages have not already been made.

Costs

The use of emergency accommodation and the increased numbers in existing DJE accommodation centres has led to a steep increase in the cost of the system. The cost of providing accommodation, food and ancillary services within the State provided accommodation system is expected to increase to over €120m in 2019, by comparison with €78m in 2018. It is expected that the additional costs of bringing centres into compliance with the recommendations of the McMahon report and with the new standards, published in August 2019, will increase this figure significantly for 2020. An IGEEES Spending Review report titled 'Direct Provision: Overview of current accommodation expenditure (July 2019)' was completed and published in 2019. The report identified the following factors driving the cost increase:

- Increase in the number of applicants;
- Persons with status remaining living in DJE accommodation;
- Length of procurement process;
- Increase in the quality of accommodation (McMahon).

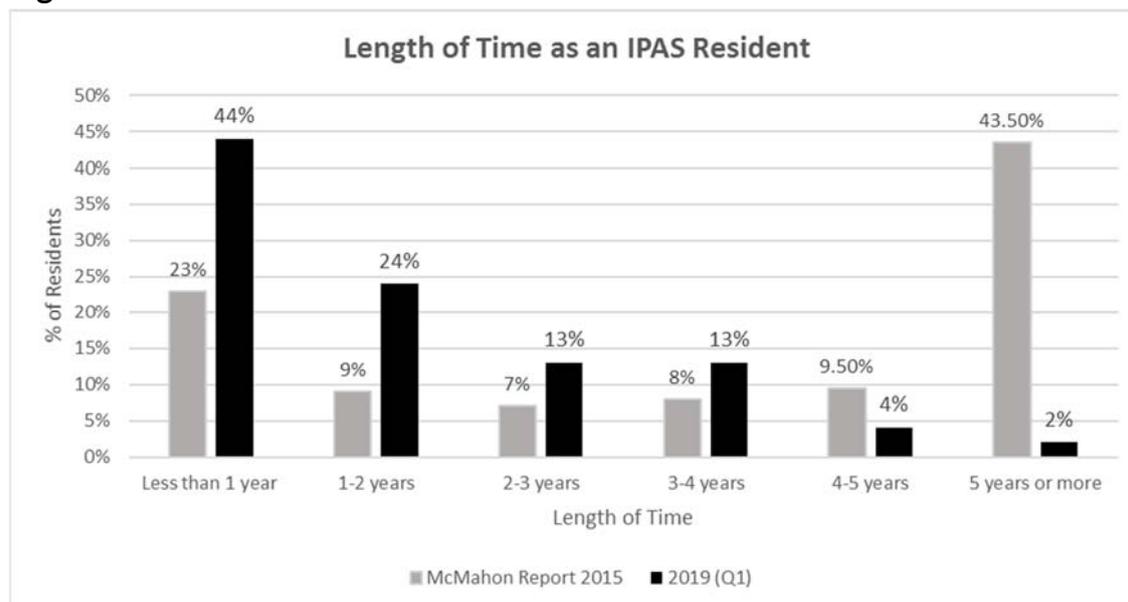
Length of Stay

The negative impact of the length of stay for residents in DJE accommodation has been highlighted in numerous reports including the McMahon Report. Concerns are highlighted regarding uncertainty for residents, lack of autonomy, lack of privacy, loss of skills, the creation of dependency and the overall impact on mental health⁶.

As can be seen from figure 7 below, there has been considerable progress in reducing first instance processing times. The mean length of stay for persons in State provided accommodation is now less than 2 years (some 21.75 months).

⁶ McMahon Report 2015 (page 64)

Figure 7



Source: IGEES Spending Review Report on Direct Provision, 2019

It should be borne in mind that the time taken to process cases to first instance decision can be impacted by factors such as non-cooperation of the applicant, delays arising from requests to postpone interviews by the applicant or legal advisor, judicial reviews, etc.

Health Service Delivery

International protection applicants are vulnerable to various infectious and non-communicable diseases, as well as mental health issues. The Directive places significant obligations on the health services to respond to the health needs of applicants.

The HSE intercultural health strategy provides a framework for meeting the health needs of people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including applicants.

The HSE faces considerable difficulties in providing health services for protection applicants because of the growth in application numbers and the limited capacity of services, especially in isolated and rural areas.

From a health perspective, there are a range of challenges including:

- the provision of voluntary health screening within the current requirement for emergency bed use and the unstructured nature of dispersals. There is a concern here regarding the risk to public health in the context of communicable disease. There are limitations in the existing health screening service given the challenges arising from

- increasing applicant numbers and limited bed capacity including - resourcing, pressures on the need for dispersal, challenges to maintain effective communication and limitations in data collection and sharing.
- the ability of primary care services to respond to the volume of new applicants (particularly where applicants may not have had access to the Reception Centre and are likely not to have medical cards in place). From the perspective of health service provision, the HSE has outlined the increasing pressures, and risks, it encounters around people being placed in emergency accommodation, isolated areas and communities where capacity of local service providers, including GPs, to respond to increased demands is limited.
 - developing a model of vulnerability health screening with the accompanying requirement for interventions based on assessed need is also challenging.
 - finally, the length of time a resident lives in State provided accommodation can be a factor for longer stay residents, particularly regarding mental health.

Additionally, it is important to note that some emergency locations are in hotels/B&Bs, where already vulnerable groups, such as homeless families, may create pressure for front line services e.g. Public Health Nurses, etc.

Responding to the needs of Children

Every effort is made to ensure that all children can be provided with a range of options to meet their needs. Pre-schooling is accessed mainly through community facilities and all school-going aged children are enrolled in local schools as appropriate. A range of other services are provided based on the population in any one centre.

There is a co-located staff member from Department of Education and Skills in DJE and a Tusla secondee who leads on child welfare and protection issues. The challenges for the DCYA in the context of direct provision are located in the Department's funded agencies, i.e. Tusla and relevant youth organisations. A significant proportion of people resident in State provided accommodation are under the age of 18 years (approximately 25% of all residents), and are therefore entitled to the same protections and access to the child welfare and protection system as all other children in the State. These responses, whether to welfare or child protection concerns, involve working with parents and other adult family members as well as children to resolve presenting issues. This includes access to the services under the umbrella of the Partnership, Prevention and Family Support (PPFS) initiative under which Tusla provides welfare supports to children and their families.

There is a child protection policy in place in DJE that operates in all centres nationally.

A 2014 HIQA inspection of child protection referrals to Tusla social work services from State provided accommodation found that the majority of referrals related to welfare, and not child protection (i.e. abuse) concerns. The report found that referrals were promptly responded to.

A 2019 Tusla internal quality assurance audit of child protection services to children in State provided accommodation found that referrals were appropriately responded to. Again, the main concerns are welfare issues for children in State provided accommodation and not child abuse concerns. The audit also noted the 2014 recommendation that Tusla develop a policy on intercultural work for staff. The report recommended that Tusla develop an intercultural strategy to inform the provision of social services to children and families from ethnic minority communities. Ensuring access to child protection and welfare services, and informing residents, including children, about the rights and protections available to them is challenging due to the consistent flow of new residents to accommodation centres and emergency accommodation nationally.

Accurate information about the number of children and young people, including those aged 18-24 years, is necessary to adequately incorporate the needs of these groups into area service plans. This can be difficult to source on an ongoing basis, and is likely to fluctuate more for accommodation centres than other services within Tusla areas. Early information about the opening of a new accommodation centre in an area aids in service planning and delivery.

Child protection services to children in State provided accommodation are believed to be operating well, with concerns being reported as per Children First and appropriately investigated. Movement of families between centres and/or emergency locations can impede assessment of a referral, and information sharing arrangements between Tusla and DJE will be reviewed to ensure timely information transfer as appropriate.

The majority of concerns identified for children in State provided accommodation are welfare concerns, and improved access to existing community child welfare services would assist in improving outcomes for these children. In order to provide sufficient services and ensure that children in State provided accommodation centres and their families can avail of local

child welfare supports (such as family resource centres), improved communication is required between Tusla and DJE.

Information about the number, age and gender of children living in State provided accommodation centres is also important in planning service provision, and arrangements for information sharing between Tusla and DJE will also be reviewed.

Tusla has appointed a senior manager with a brief for inclusion. Liaison between that office and DJE regarding the needs of children and families in State provided accommodation centres would improve service delivery and the targeting of resources.

Further support to all Tusla staff to increase skills and knowledge in working with new communities in Ireland, including children and families in the international protection process would be of value.

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. The overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national inter-agency working.

Children and young people up to the age of 24 fall under the scope of services co-ordinated by CYPSCs. Arrangements for information sharing between DJE and the National Children and Young People's Services Committees Steering Group should be put in place to ensure that the needs of residents in DJE accommodation are included in the Children and Young People's Plan for each area.

Information sharing arrangements such as those suggested above could be co-ordinated through the Child and Family Services Unit Manager, who is seconded to DJE from Tusla and works as part of the DJE management team.

7. Current Initiatives to Respond to Challenges

In response to the growth in the number of applicants, a number of initiatives have been undertaken.

- To date in 2019 DJE has been able to acquire sufficient emergency bed provision to ensure that no applicant is homeless. This now involves 37 locations nationally.
- DJE has recently increased the size of the National Reception Centre, Baleskin from 350 persons to 487. This will provide greater potential for all new applicants to receive a preliminary orientation, be registered for Temporary Residency Cards and the PPSN and be offered health screening.
- A new medical facility has been built to ensure that the health needs of all residents within the expanded facility can be met and to respond to any revised assessments for health vulnerability.
- In response to the ongoing dispersal of protection applicants to emergency accommodation, the Safetynet Mobile Health Assessment Unit (MHAU) has also been offering health screening to residents. Not all residents living in emergency accommodation have been offered health screening as people are being dispersed at a high rate and the rate of turnover of residents in some emergency centres is high. Additionally, for those living in emergency accommodation, gaining access to primary care services is challenging, particularly in relation to GP services. Solutions are sought by the HSE on a location specific basis.
- A visiting support and cultural awareness service has been put in place in the Dublin area and is currently being extended into the Cavan/Monaghan area.
- DJE has structured service delivery in certain emergency bed locations to better provide for the needs of children, working with the Department of Education and Skills and the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) in support of children accessing school places.
- In conjunction with the Office of Government Procurement, the International Protection Procurement Services (IPPS) is mid-way through rolling out a public procurement process on a regional basis

throughout the State. This process is well advanced and will be completed by early 2020 and a number of new centres will open later this year . Additionally, under an Expression of Interest for new accommodation centres published in September 2018, IPPS is pursuing several potential options with suppliers.

- It is considered that the funding model for State provided accommodation will need to be considered and applied appropriately to deliver an adequate supply of housing to the necessary standards. For example, existing centre capacity could be funded through current expenditure on a cost per night basis using modular build. Funding the State owned option will require further consideration and engagement between DJE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The key objective is to provide capacity to move away as soon as possible from emergency accommodation which is the least efficient and most expensive way of meeting the needs of the applicants.
- The IDG recognised the need to work more strategically within the existing structures for funding and activating NGO engagement at local level, primarily SICAP⁷, to ensure that local initiatives to support persons in State provided accommodation are better coordinated and focused on areas of greatest need. The IDG pointed also to the need to align this work with the Community and Voluntary Sector Strategy developed by the Department of Rural and Community Development.
- The model of communication/engagement with communities is acknowledged to be in need of review. Under the current procurement model, confirmation of a new centre opening is fully dependent on a contract being entered into between IPPS and the supplier. This is often very shortly before the centre opens. An inter-departmental committee has recently been established to ensure the maximum alignment and consistency of communication between partner departments and community representatives. The committee will aim to enhance the community engagement to take place in the context of the opening of new centres and aims to ensure the maximum flow of information to political, public and community representatives, so that operational planning involving all Departments/agencies can be clearly articulated.

⁷ Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme – provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

- The protests that have accompanied the establishment of new centres, including emergency centres, have indicated that there is growing readiness to express racist sentiment as a component in the wider opposition to Direct Provision. The Government has established an Anti-Racism Committee, chaired by Professor Caroline Fennell. The new Committee has a mandate to review current evidence and practice and make recommendations to Government on how best to strengthen its approach to tackling racism. The Committee will be a broad-based partnership, including employers and unions, church representatives, sporting and community organisations, public authorities, and media organisations. Its purpose is to develop an understanding of the nature and prevalence of racism in Ireland and to work towards achieving consensus on actions required, by the member organisations and others. Consideration will be given by the new Anti-Racism Committee to ways of addressing this problem and to ensuring that it does not become a mechanism for generating broader support for racist ideas. The Committee will convene early in 2020 and will produce its first report to Government within three months.
- The Advisory Group on the Provision of Support, including Accommodation, to Persons in the International Protection Process, chaired by Catherine Day, also has a potential role in this regard. It has a mandate to look at the issue of community engagement and can consider how that engagement can be used to challenge expressions of racism against asylum seekers at local level.
- With regard to persons with status in DP accommodation (which currently stands at 860), in conjunction with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the County and City Management Association, an allocation model has been agreed whereby housing supports are being made available by local authorities across the country for persons who qualify for social housing supports, with the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) being the recommended exit mechanism for households exiting State provided accommodation. The allocation model is similar to that developed for refugees resettled in Ireland under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. To reduce the risk that households exiting State provided accommodation have to present as homeless, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has also made the tools under Homeless HAP available to persons with status who have been assessed and are eligible for social housing supports.

- In support of this model, DJE has funded a number of NGO-led initiatives to assist persons with status to move from State provided accommodation to accommodation within the community, primarily through DePaul Ireland and the Peter McVerry Trust. The NGOs will liaise with the appropriate local authority contact (including, where applicable, the HAP Placefinder) to discuss local arrangements for streamlining the processing of HAP applications, once accommodation has been secured.
- DPER is exploring with the Department of Finance how the existing Rent-a-Room tax relief could potentially provide an accommodation route for those residents in State provided accommodation who receive a permission to Remain. The Rent-a-Room relief allows home-owners to rent out a room in their house with the associated rent being deemed tax-free up to €14,000 per annum. In 2017 just over 8,000 persons availed of the relief at a cost to the Exchequer of €12m. Apart from the obvious benefit to the home owner the relief has served to deliver effectively a new supply source where supply in the wider market has been slow coming on stream. Where this has proven most effective is in the student sector where education providers together with the Union of Students in Ireland have promoted the awareness of the relief in order to address accommodation issues. As the situation faced by residents with positive decisions to remain has some similarities, given that the majority of accommodation sought is for single people, it is considered that NGOs could play a similar role to that of the USI. This approach could also facilitate better integration into the community.
- In relation to children and families, the Migrant Family Support Service, part funded by Tusla, has provided parental information sessions in several of the accommodation centres in and around the Dublin area. Preliminary discussions with the service in 2018 indicated that they would be open to offering the sessions to parents in other centres nationally. The sessions gave information about child protection legislation in Ireland, and also on where parents can seek help and support if they need it.
- Implementing parenting information and support sessions on a rolling basis across the network of accommodation centres would meet an information need for new residents about services available in their locality, and provide an accessible forum to get information about child protection and welfare in Ireland.

- It is proposed that the Inter-Departmental group which prepared this report will continue to oversee its implementation over the course of 2020.

8. Longer term strategies for providing supports.

An Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process has recently been established by the Minister. It is chaired by Catherine Day. The advisory group will have the following role:

- To advise on the development of a long-term approach to the provision of support including accommodation to persons in the international protection process;
- To identify good practice in European countries in the provision of supports to persons within the international protection process, particularly dealing with variations in demand;
- To set out a process for achieving the long term approach to supporting persons in the international protection process.

Membership of the advisory group includes former public servants and three NGO representatives. The advisory group began its work in October 2019 and will continue until the end of 2020. It is planned that the advisory group will hear presentations from the European Asylum Support Office, from specified EU Member States and from experts in specified sectors, as necessary, to inform its work.

The IDG also discussed engaging other stakeholders to join or to lead on projects to develop new facilities for persons in the State provided accommodation system. The IDG discussed the model of mixed provision in other EU Member States where NGOs and other civil society organisations routinely develop or manage services to, and facilities for, persons in the protection process. The IDG was also briefed on a proposal to develop clusters of NGO provided support to specific vulnerability units around core centres (for example for victims of trafficking, victims of torture, persons with mental health issues, and persons exhibiting violent behaviour). This would be a further addition to the range of procurement models being utilised and would fundamentally differ through the active role of NGOs in core service delivery rather than commercial operators. A key issue concerning the greater participation of NGOs in the provision of accommodation is the procurement and funding model, with NGOs requiring greater certainty of income over longer periods than the private sector.

9. Experience in other EU Member States – a general overview

There is considerable divergence between EU Member States (MS) in terms of what is provided for protection applicants. However, all must ensure compliance with the provisions of the EU Reception Conditions Directive. The majority of EU MS (16, including Ireland) operate reception centres for protection applicants. Most of these MS use a range of operators to run centres. Many MS run the centres directly. Some use local authorities to operate centres, some use the International Red Cross and others use NGOs. No NGO has tendered to run a centre in Ireland through the procurement process or through expressions of interest. A minority of MS (6) use private contractors to operate centres. A table of the situation in each MS is attached at Appendix 3.

MS often have housing options that are tailored to the specific needs of asylum seekers, with different arrangements applying if the asylum seeker has medical or psycho-social needs, is LGBTI+, is with his/her family or is an unaccompanied minor.

Most MS provide financial allowances to cover expenses such as food, clothing, basic needs, personal needs and personal hygiene. Six MS offer financial allowances to cover applicants to live in private premises, including flats. Three MS provide a financial allowance to cover rental costs.

Many MS have a phased approach whereby an applicant is required to live in a reception centre for the initial period but is eligible for a greater variety of options thereafter.

Many MS operate a reimbursement system whereby an applicant is expected to reimburse the relevant government for expenses incurred once the applicant takes up employment.

A number of MS operate separate administrative detention facilities for applicants who fail the asylum process while awaiting return to their country of origin. There are currently no such plans for this approach in Ireland and such persons remain in State provided accommodation until they can be returned to their country of origin, a process that can take a considerable period of time.

Asylum benefits in the EU: How Member States compare

The current weekly allowance for persons in State provided accommodation is €38.80 per week for adults and €29.80 for each child which equates to a

monthly payment of €168 and €129 respectively. The level of financial aid EU MS provide to asylum seekers can vary significantly from country to country. Germany, for instance, grants monthly allowances of up to €354 with a lesser amount up to €135 if an applicant is living in state provided accommodation; Austria provides a monthly allowance of €40 for those living in State-run housing.

EU asylum law stipulates that MS must ensure that everyone in need of international protection is guaranteed a fair asylum application process. It also obliges MS to honour certain humanitarian and social standards in housing asylum seekers and provide for life's necessities. EU MS must ensure an "adequate standard of living for applicants, which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health". In reality, however, MS have very different notions of what constitutes an "adequate standard of living". Depending on the country, asylum seekers receive cash and/or vouchers to be used in certain shops. So far, apart from the work of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), there are limited cross country comparisons over who gets what and where in the EU which makes a nuanced comparison between EU MS difficult.

Another factor complicating comparisons is the varying costs of living in different EU MS. For the sake of simplicity, the following list will focus on the types of benefits afforded to single male asylum seekers in major EU countries. It will not enumerate what benefits are available for individuals whose asylum processes have been completed and who have been granted refugee protection status.

Country specific material created in the main on desk based research is as follows:

Germany

According to Germany's Asylum Seekers Benefits Act, asylum seekers receive €354 per month, which is approximately €70 less than what recipients of regular social security get. Asylum seekers living in private accommodation receive part of these benefits in the form of non-cash contributions. Individuals living in state-run shared accommodation receive no more than €135 per month, either in cash and/or as vouchers. Only individuals who have been granted refugee protection status are entitled to regular social security benefits.

Italy

Individuals who have applied for asylum in Italy are guaranteed accommodation until their applications have been processed. They receive

food, hygiene products and clothing. Critics have long highlighted the poor quality of Italy's asylum seeker reception centres. Two months after filing an asylum application, applicants may take up a job. Unemployed applicants living in reception centres receive €75 per month, or €2.50 per day. This financial assistance is only awarded to individuals housed in reception centres.

Sweden

The Swedish Migration Agency provides applicants with temporary accommodation during the time they are waiting for a decision. Applicants no longer have a right to live in Migration Agency accommodation if they have received a notice of rejection or expulsion. The Migration Agency pays for accommodation if an applicant does not have any resources. However, applicants with sufficient means must pay for their accommodation as well as food that is provided. If applicants are unable to source accommodation, they can live in state-run housing for free.

The following information provided by EASO is also in line with the information from the Swedish Migration Agency:

- Applicants living in accommodation provided by the Migration Agency where food is not provided receive, subject to a means test, €205 per month for a single adult, €176 per month for each co-habiting adult and from €107 to €144 per month for children depending on their age;
- Applicants living in accommodation provided by the Migration Agency where food is provided receive, subject to a means test, €69 per month per single adult, €55 per month for each co-habiting adult and €35 per month per child (0-17);
- Applicants who are offered work and have to move to a place where the Migration Agency does not have any accommodation receive €80 per month for families and €32 per month for single adults.

Individuals living in private accommodation receive roughly €225 each month to cover food, hygiene products, clothing, medical treatment, medicine and leisure time activities, but not rent. Once applicants are granted refugee protection status and have received a work permit, they must organise their own private accommodation. For comparison: an adult Swede on social welfare receives €394 per month.

France

As of 2015, asylum seekers receive a monthly allowance of €204. Every additional individual living in the same household gets an extra €102. This financial assistance is adjusted yearly to match inflation. Individuals who reject living in state-run housing lose their right to receive benefits. To access their allowance, asylum seekers are usually provided with special credit cards that do not require bank accounts.

United Kingdom

Individuals applying for asylum in the United Kingdom cannot choose where they want to live in the country. Instead, they are allocated accommodation and receive €170 each month to cover expenses for food, clothing and hygiene products. Mothers with children younger than three years old as well as pregnant women receive an additional €13 each month. The Home Office may grant permission to work to asylum seekers whose claim has been outstanding for more than 12 months through no fault of their own. Those who are allowed to work are restricted to jobs on the shortage occupation list published by the Home Office. They have free access to the National Health Service and state-run schools.

Spain

During an initial six-month period, individuals applying for asylum in Spain are housed in shared accommodation where they receive food and a monthly allowance of roughly €50. An additional €19 is provided for each child. Expenses such as public transport, medical treatment, language courses and the use of translators are reimbursed if an invoice is provided. In a subsequent six-month period, applicants move into private accommodation and the Spanish state covers their rent. In addition, applicants get a monthly allowance of between €300 and €500, depending on marital status. In a third and final six-month phase, applicants are allowed to work. They only receive social benefits in absolute emergencies.

Austria

Asylum seekers can choose between state-run housing, where they receive food and a monthly allowance of €40, and accommodation where they get an allowance of between €150 and €200 to buy and cook their own food. Some Austrian states have capped this allowance at €100 per child. Asylum seekers receive up to €150 per year to purchase clothing. Usually, vouchers are handed out for use in specific clothing shops. Children receive up to €200 per year for school supplies. Here, too, vouchers are common. Individuals who opt for private accommodation and who choose to provide their own food,

clothing and other necessities receive between €320 and €365, excluding rent.

Greece

In Greece, the National Centre for Social Solidarity and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) carry responsibility for providing asylum seekers with necessities and ensuring they have access to health care. Applicants living in state-run housing receive a monthly allowance of €90, which is sometimes provided in the form of vouchers. On many Greek islands, asylum seekers struggle to get their cash allowances. A family of up to seven individuals living in private accommodation receives up to €550 per month.

Appendix 1: Membership of Inter-Departmental Group on Direct Provision

Deputy Secretary General Oonagh Buckley, The DJE

Assistant Secretary Rónán Hession, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

Assistant Secretary Mary Hurley, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (incl County and City Management Association)

Assistant Secretary Ronnie Downes, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

John Burke, Principal Officer, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Assistant Secretary Dalton Tatton, Department of Department of Education and Skills

Jim Walsh, Principal Officer, Department of Health

Dairearca Ní Neill, Assistant Principal, Department of Health

Joe Doyle, National Social Lead, National Social Inclusion Unit, HSE

Dr Margaret Fitzgerald, National Social Inclusion Unit, HSE

Kate Gillen, Assistant Principal, Department of Children and Youth Affairs (including Tusla)

Assistant Secretary Carol Baxter, The DJE

Assistant Secretary Michael Kirrane, The DJE

Louise Sandom, Principal Officer, The DJE

Mark Wilson, Principal Officer, The DJE

Brian Merriman, Principal Officer, The DJE (joined July, 2019)

Ruth Dillon, HEO, (secretariat) The DJE (until August, 2019)

Jennifer Bannon, EO, (secretariat) The DJE (from August, 2019)

Alternate members

Des Henry, Principal Officer, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

Caroline Timmons, Principal Officer, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

Fiona Conroy, Assistant Principal, Department of Health

Michele Clarke, Chief Social Worker, Department of Children and Youth Affairs (including Tusla)

Appendix 2

Dates on which the committee met.

The IDG held five meetings on:

- 29 May 2019
- 12 June 2019
- 18 July 2019 (Balseskin Reception Centre)
- 18 September 2019
- 9 October 2019
- 5 December 2019

Appendix 3

Reception Conditions in EU Member States

The following comparison aims to provide a basic overview of the wide array of reception facilities used in the 23 AIDA countries:

Figure 8

*	First-line reception	Second-line reception
AT	Federal reception centres, distribution centres, special centres for children	Private housing at provincial level
BE	Collective centres	Private housing at local level
BG	Detention centres	Reception and registration centres, transit centre, closed reception facilities
CY	-	Reception centre, centres for children, private housing
DE	Initial reception centres	Collective centres, decentralised accommodation
ES	Refugee reception centres (CAR), temporary stay centres (CETI)	Private housing managed by NGOs
FR	Reception and Orientation Centre (CAO), Reception and Accommodation Programme for Asylum Seekers (PRAHDA), Reception and Administrative Situation Examination Centre (CAES)	Reception centres for asylum seekers (CADA), emergency centres
GR	Reception and Identification Centres	Reception centres for asylum seekers and vulnerable groups
HR	-	Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers
HU	-	Reception centres
IE	-	Direct provision
IT	First aid centres (CPSA), Governmental first reception centres, Temporary reception centres (CAS)	System of protection of asylum seekers and refugees (SPRAR)
MT	Initial Reception Centre	Open centres, private houses/flats
NL	Collective centres	Asylum seeker centres
PL	Reception centres	Reception centres
PT	-	Reception centres, private accommodation
RO	-	Regional Centres for Procedures and Accommodation of Asylum Seekers
SE	-	Migration Agency housing, private accommodation, special accommodation
SI	-	Reception centres
UK	Initial accommodation centres	Private accommodation (Section 95)
CH	Federal reception and processing centres	Private housing at cantonal level, Zurich test centre (not counted)
SR	Asylum centre	Asylum centres
TR	-	-

Source for the table: <https://www.asylumineurope.org/comparator/reception>