

Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP)

Background, Rationale and Functions

What is the IRPP?

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. A programme office was established in October 2015 to carry out the aims of the Government Decision. Under this programme, the Government has pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State: 2,622 asylum seekers through the EU relocation mechanism established by two EU Council Decisions in 2015 to assist Italy and Greece, and 1,040 (519 in 2016 and the remainder in 2017) programme refugees under the UNHCR-led refugee resettlement programme currently focussed on resettling refugees from Lebanon. Those coming from Lebanon are managed by the Office of Promotion for Migrant Integration as they already have considerable experience in bringing in programme refugees.

Those coming in as relocated asylum seekers via Greece/Italy are managed by the Programme Office of the IRPP. Those destined for the new Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROCC) in Roscommon will be asylum seekers coming via the Greece/Italy route. As this cohort will receive a grant of international protection within a period of 8-12 weeks, their stay in EROCCs is intended to be short-term after which they will be housed somewhere in Ireland.

The IRPP is overseen by a high-level Government Taskforce composed of senior staff from all key Government Departments, the local authorities, relevant State agencies, the UNHCR and the Irish Red Cross.

What is the context for this?

The immediate context for this is the migration crisis in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean as a consequence of the war in Syria and broader conflict in the Middle East. However, this crisis must be seen in the broader context. The world is facing an unprecedented level of migration caused by people being displaced from their home as a result of conflict, war and natural disaster. On a global scale 65 million people are currently displaced from their homes. World leaders met in September 2016 in New York and acknowledged this is a refugee crisis beyond anything previously seen.

No country, signed up to the principles of United Nations can in good conscience ignore its obligations to its fellow man. Ireland, with its history of emigration but also with its proud history of humanitarianism (Ireland invariably ranks among the highest in terms of charitable donations to causes abroad per GDP) has risen to the challenge posed by the migrant crisis.

The Irish Government voluntarily signed up to two EU Council Decision and extended its commitments under its Refugee Resettlement programme to guarantee safe haven for 4,000 people, with an emphasis on women and children, caught up in the migration crisis.

These persons coming into EROCs are the most vulnerable of those seeking international protection. They are essentially those fleeing war, who have been forcibly ejected from their homes, been traumatised and have travelled great distances at sometimes enormous personal cost.

Who is entitled to International Protection?

There are three categories of persons who are entitled to claim international protection under Irish and international law. These are:

- (i) Refugees
- (ii) Persons relocated to Ireland under the EU relocation decisions
- (iii) Those who arrive in Ireland and claim asylum here.

Refugees are those persons who have been displaced from their home country and have been deemed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to be refugees.

This particular hotel is coming under contract for the provision of services to those in category (ii) above.

These people are provided with shelter and full board accommodation in Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) on arrival in Ireland. This follows best international practice as set out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

What is an Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC)?

The main function of an EROC is to provide the basic needs of those resident there **AND** the intense range of support services which are generally speaking not available to asylum seekers who arrive in the normal course. For relocation asylum seekers this also includes the hearing of their claim for asylum and the grant of refugee status within a ten to twelve-week period. In the meantime, they are provided with full bed and board, access to English language training by the ETBs and a range of other services.

These also include vulnerability assessments while they are still overseas and links with service providers upon arrival.

As those placed in EROCs ultimately receive a speedy decision on refugee status their stay will be as short-term as possible.

Asylum seekers arriving under relocation will receive status within a quick time frame and will remain in EROCs only as long as the time necessary for the provision of core services and finding a suitable community in which to be permanently resettled.

What is the selection process for EROCs?

In recognition that the predicted potential rapid influx of vulnerable migrants under the IRPP would need some form of emergency accommodation and service provision, an expression of interest process was launched in October 2015 to identify potential properties capable of meeting that requirement. Approximately 90 properties were offered at this juncture. After a short-listing exercise based on suitability and state of repair, 14 properties emerged as having potential. The selection process was suspended in early 2016 because the numbers arriving under the EU relocation programme were lower than anticipated due to operational problems in Greece and Italy. When the numbers arriving increased in late 2016 and the IRPP became more operationalised, the shortlist was re-examined. The property in question was identified as the only property on the shortlist that could be made operational as an EROC within a timeframe that would meet demand in early 2017.

Why was Ballaghaderreen selected?

The property in Ballaghaderreen was selected because it was only one available that met requirements and would be ready in reasonable time. Moreover, while the initial selection of a suitable EROC is to a large degree influenced by the availability of suitable properties consideration is also given to a number of factors including;

- the accommodation capacity of the EROC
- its potential for on-site services
- the potential availability of school placements for children of a school going age
- the availability of GPs within reasonable travelling distance
- the proximity of local hospitals
- the experience of the location in having asylum seekers previously
- availability of other local services including public transport and shopping
- potential for the centre managers to provide additional services to both residents and local population
- potential benefits to local commerce

As already stated no alternatives presented themselves when it came to meeting the immediate demand of opening a new EROC, however the considerations listed above were not ignored. Ballaghaderreen is quite centrally placed in Roscommon and many primary and secondary schools are within reasonable bussing distance. There is a hospital in Roscommon Town and Ballaghaderreen itself has experience in welcoming asylum seekers and refugees to its community.

How long are the migrants in the EROC?

Migrants arriving under the IRPP are expected to reside in emergency accommodation for a minimum of 6 months while awaiting a determination on their refugee status (for those relocated from Greece and Italy) and while awaiting a suitable permanent housing solution to be identified for them. It should be noted that permanent housing solutions involve a nationwide strategy so there will only be a limited possibility that residents at the EROC in question will remain in the locale once they are given full refugees status.

What is the value of the contract?

Unfortunately, due to the commercial sensitivity of this information, this cannot be disclosed. However, there are not insignificant local benefits arising from increased employment and the necessity for local services such as food and supplies and other local services.

Will the facility be open to the public?

As a general rule no. Best international practice is that those relocated from one country to another require a period of stability and relaxation to settle down into a new way of life.

After a very short initial period, we will establish a “Friends of the Centre” group to coordinate local voluntary supports. This group will provide assistance in delivering local voluntary support services in a co-ordinated and structured manner.

We are aware that there is a leisure centre attached to the hotel property. We do not intend to use this position of the facility as matters now stand. However, under the contract this portion of the property will remain available for use should an operator be prepared to run it. We would endeavour to facilitate the operation of such a facility should it become available for use.

We would also be prepared to consider facilitating access to meeting facilities in the hotel for some local groups should such facilities be available.

Will the bar be open to the public?

The contract does not require or specify the need for a public bar. Nevertheless, for as long as it operates as an EROC, it would not be appropriate for the property to offer the services of a licenced premises.

What services will be provided in the centre?

The full range of state services will be provided at the centre or in the town. Every effort is made to mainstream services with local populations while not impacting on the delivery of local services. Thus children may attend local schools and adults may the language classes at local ETBs. If needs be these facilities could be provided directly to the children and adults

although our strong preference is that are provided in conjunction with local services as this helps significantly with integration.

The centre will operate as an EROC (Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre). Among the services requiring delivery at EROCs are as follows;

- Full board incl. 3 meals a day and snacks for all residents
- All light and heat paid for
- Self-service laundry facilities
- Wi-fi throughout
- Bus Service to major towns and service delivery locations
- Office space for GP services, and HSE medical screening, Social Protection and Dept. of Justice outreach
- Link in with local services
- Classroom Space for English language training and potentially primary and pre-school services
- Regular “clinics” with staff of the IRPP

What about security?

Every person relocated to Ireland has been security checked by the Garda Síochána prior to arrival in Ireland. In addition, personnel from the IRPP have met all of the people who will be placed in EROCs and will meet them on a regular basis.

IRPP

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