



2017

Welcome to Athlone – Information for Asylum Seekers



New Horizon Information Group

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Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Welcome to Ireland	6
2.1	<i>Ireland</i>	6
2.2	<i>Athlone.....</i>	7
2.3	<i>Emergency Services.....</i>	9
3	Refugees in Athlone.....	11
4	The Direct Provision Site.....	12
5	Living in Direct Provision	13
5.1	<i>Physical Health</i>	14
5.2	<i>Mental Health</i>	15
6	Education.....	19
6.1	<i>Primary Education</i>	20
6.2	<i>Second Level Education</i>	20
6.3	<i>Third Level Education</i>	22
6.4	<i>Further and adult education</i>	23
6.5	<i>Special needs education for children with disabilities</i>	23
7	Asylum-Seeking Process	24
7.1	<i>Definition of Refugee.....</i>	24
7.2	<i>Process Flowchart</i>	26
7.3	<i>Dublin III Convention</i>	29
7.4	<i>Preparing for the Asylum Interview.....</i>	30
7.5	<i>At the Asylum Interview</i>	33
	Moving out of the Asylum Process.....	36
8	Appendices.....	38
8.1	<i>General overview information.....</i>	38
8.2	<i>Government agencies.....</i>	38

There are 37 pages in this document

Use **Ctrl + Click** to follow a hypertext link in this document.

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1 Introduction

This booklet provides information for people in the Irish Asylum system who finds themselves in Athlone in the Irish Midlands.

The asylum system is difficult and complex and may change from time to time. The information given in this document is correct at the time of writing but we recommend that you contact lawyers and advice services to find out if the information given is still valid. A list of legal and advice services is given in the appendix to this document.

Information given in this document or by a New Horizon volunteer is not legal advice. If you need legal advice it is important to consult a lawyer.

If you notice content which is incorrect, misleading or inaccurate please contact us at any of the contact points shown below. The reception desk at the direct provision centre can also help you make contact with New Horizon.

Updated versions of this document are printed as needed.

Who Are New Horizon?

We are a loose group of people who have been working together in Athlone since 2000. We are a group of volunteers and don't get money for our work or work for the state. We promise total and absolute confidentiality in all our dealings with clients.

Why are you handing me this guide?

As activists, we welcome refugees and asylum seekers and wish to help and support them as they start to rebuild their lives. We would like to:

- Give you some useful information about Athlone and Ireland.
- Provide you with some information on how to maintain your physical and mental health
- Provide some information to help you navigate the asylum process.
- Provide useful information to help you leave the asylum process.

What does New Horizon do?

New Horizon provides a range of information, helping and befriending services to current and former residents of the Direct Provision site in Lissywollen, Athlone.

If you need any more information, please get in touch with us.

How do I contact New Horizon?

On facebook -
<https://www.facebook.com/newhorizonathlone/?fref=ts>



Email us at newhorizonathlone@gmail.com



Call to our drop-in service on Wednesdays from 12.00pm to 2.00pm in the New Horizon office where one of our members will try to help you.

2 Welcome to Ireland



2.1 Ireland

Ireland is an island in the North Atlantic. It is separated from Great Britain to its east by the North Channel, the Irish Sea and St George's Channel. Ireland is the second-largest island of the British Isles, the third-largest in Europe, and the twentieth-largest on Earth.

Politically, Ireland is divided between the Republic of Ireland (officially named Ireland), which covers five-sixths of the island, and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, in the northeast of the island. In 2011, the population of the island of Ireland was about 6.4 million, ranking it the second-most populous island in Europe after Great Britain. 4.6 million people live in the Republic of Ireland and just over 1.8 million live in Northern Ireland.

The island has relatively low-lying mountains surrounding a central plain, with several navigable rivers extending inland. The island has lush vegetation, a product of its mild but changeable climate which avoids extremes in temperature. The Irish climate is very moderate. As a result, winters are milder than expected for such a northerly area with infrequent frost and snow. Summers are cooler than those in Continental Europe with abundant rainfall and cloud cover.

Travel between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is usually uncontrolled and it is frequently difficult to know where the border is. The Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) and British immigration occasionally have checks on public transport crossing the border.

If you have applied for asylum in the Republic of Ireland you are not automatically entitled to travel to Northern Ireland. Ask for advice before attempting to cross the border.

2.2 Athlone

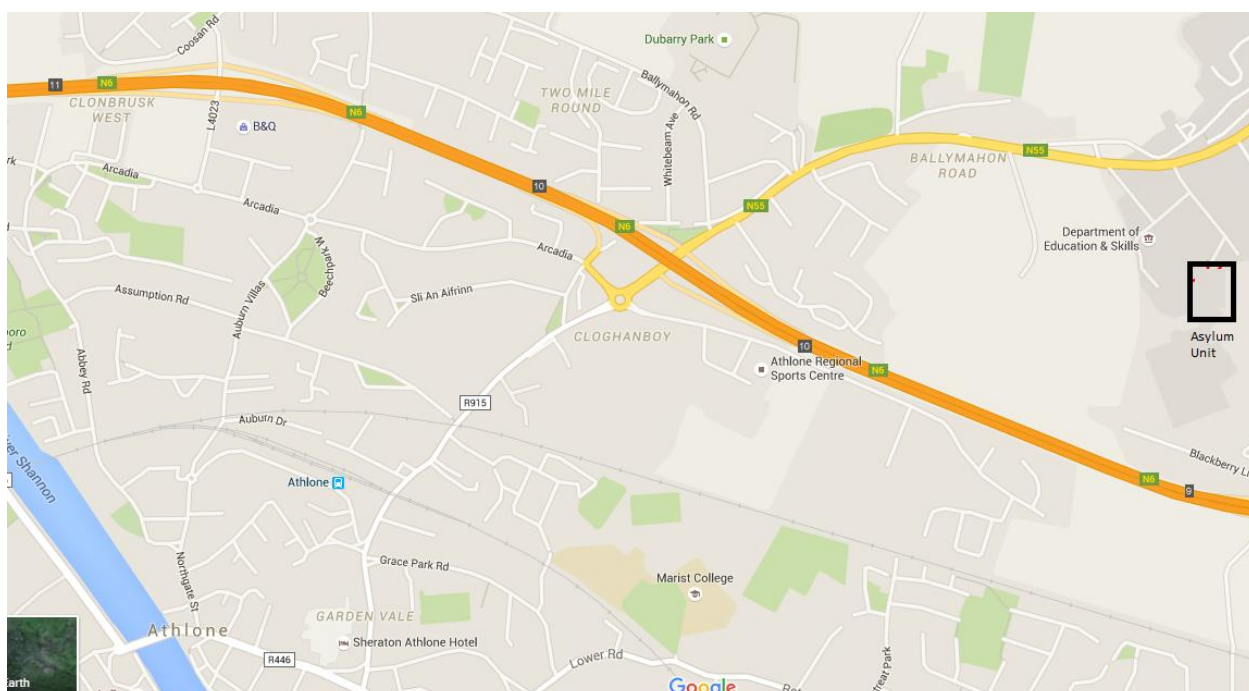


Athlone is a town on the River Shannon near the southern shore of Lough Ree. It is the largest town in the Midlands Region. Most of the town lies on the east bank of the river; however, an area on the west bank of the Shannon is also included in the town.

The 2011 Census of Ireland recorded the population of the town at 20,153. Recent growth has also occurred outside the town's boundaries.

A direct provision (DP) site for accommodating asylum seekers has been in operation in Athlone since 2000.

If you are arriving by car from Dublin or Galway, at exit 10 from the bypass take the N55 north. If arriving by bus or train take the N55 north. The accommodation unit is located behind the Department of Education and Skills building, approximately 2km from the town centre.



Transport

Rail



Athlone railway station provides train services travelling eastwards to Portarlington, Kildare, and Dublin Heuston, and westwards to the Westport/Ballina lines as well as to Athenry, Oranmore, and Galway.

Bus



Bus Éireann, the national bus operator, operates beside the railway station and provides an hourly service to Dublin and Galway. Other services provide transportation to Limerick, Dundalk, Waterford, Cavan, Belfast, Longford, and Roscommon.

Bus Éireann also operates a local Athlone bus service. Route 459 runs from the Bus Station to Willow Park and Athlone Institute Of Technology, Route 459A runs from Monksland, in the west to Athlone Institute Of Technology.

A bus service operates twice a day to the Direct Provision site. See timetable in the site reception.

Taxi



Taxi service is widely available throughout the area but this is more expensive than public transport.

Road



The town is situated on the M6 motorway connecting Galway to Dublin. The route bypasses Athlone on the northern side of the town, crossing the River Shannon into county Roscommon. A number of national secondary roads connect Athlone with other towns and regions. The N55 road connects the town with Ballymahon and Cavan, the N61 road connects it with Roscommon, and the N62 road connects it with Birr, Roscrea, and southern Ireland.

2.3 Emergency Services

All emergency services, Ambulance, Police (Gardai), and Fire Brigade, may be contacted by ringing 999 or 112. There is no charge for using this number. It may be called from any phone even if you do not have credit on the phone.

Police



An Garda Síochána (known as ‘the Guards’) is the Irish police service. They are an unarmed service. They have been quite helpful and supportive to asylum seekers and refugees in the past.

The local Garda station is in Barrack street Athlone, beside the big church. Telephone (090) 64 98550

The Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) deals with immigration-related issues. They are based in Harcourt St. Dublin 2. Telephone 01-6666666.

Note that all these activities are criminal offenses in Ireland. If you commit any of them, prosecution may follow:

- Begging

- Carrying a weapon, including knives of any sort, is considered a very serious offence
- Larceny (stealing, shoplifting)
- Creating a nuisance or disturbance
- Driving without a license or insurance
- Assault
- Domestic Violence is totally unacceptable in this country.
- Drunk and Disorderly behaviour

If you are convicted of any offence this may have an effect on any future application you make for leave to remain.

Ambulance Service



The National Ambulance Service provides paramedic support and transport to hospital in case of emergency. Phone 999 or 112.

Fire



The Fire brigade service covers fire emergencies. Phone 999 or 112.

3 Refugees in Athlone

History

A small number of refugee families have been living in the Athlone area since the early 1980's.

In 1999 the Irish government introduced the 'Dispersal and Direct Provision' scheme for asylum seekers. The asylum seeker accommodation unit in Athlone was opened then. A number of former residents of the direct provision site continue to live in the Athlone area.

4 The Direct Provision Site



The asylum seekers site in Lissywollen Athlone has been in operation since October 1999. Located in an industrial area on the northern outskirts of the town, it consists of 100 mobile homes, an administration block and a medical block.

There are 19 6-berth and 81 4-berth mobile homes giving a total possible population of 438 people. Normally 200 to 300 residents live there.

It was originally a family-only site but now also accommodates single asylum seekers.

The administration block consists of a canteen, laundry, community welfare office, recreation area and offices.

The medical block contains the public health nurse, doctor's office, and New Horizon office.

There is a playground and a few open areas that are used for sporting activities.

5 Living in Direct Provision



Life in direct provision can be quite stressful. You are now an official asylum seeker and the pressure to find food and shelter each day is removed. Deeper and previously suppressed physical and mental issues can surface, it is important to be aware of them.

It is very important to keep both physically and mentally healthy.

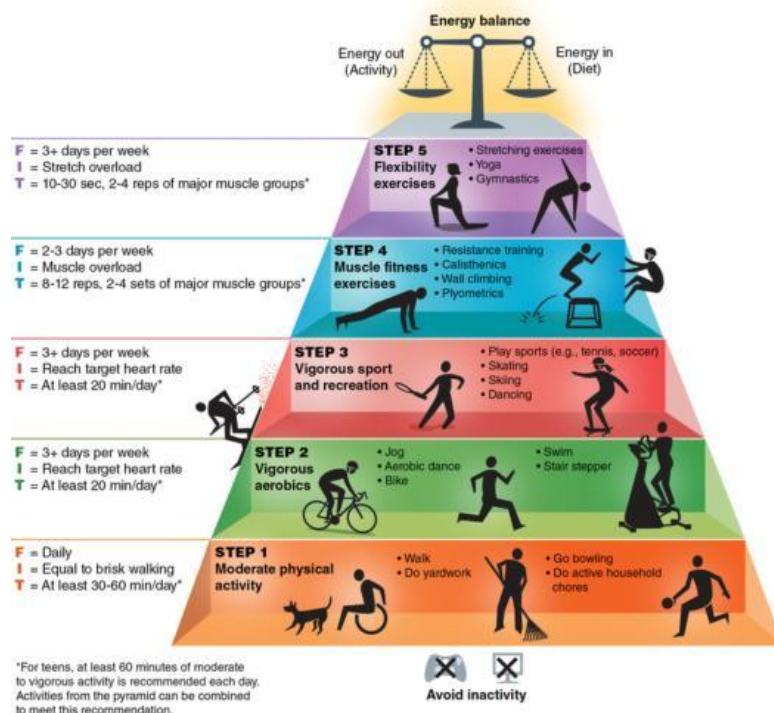
You will be given a form to apply for a medical card that entitles you to free doctor services. The public health nurse on site will arrange a full check up for you and your family when you arrive and will also give general health advice.

The asylum seeking process can take a long time and you are prohibited from working during this time. It is important not to waste your time while waiting. Making contacts and friends in the local Irish community can be very worthwhile. In addition to making life more enjoyable they can help you with contacts and information.

Some suggestions are:

- Learn English or improve your existing English language skills
- Develop your computer skills
- Learn another language, other asylum seekers can teach you
- Take up a new sport
- Learn a new skill
- Volunteer your time with local community organisations

5.1 Physical Health



Physical activity

Most healthy children and adults should be active on a daily basis. This should be a mix of both leisurely physical activity and structured exercise. Examples of leisurely physical activity include hiking, cycling, and walking. Examples of more structured forms of exercise include strength training, running, and sports.

Nutrition and diet

Eating a healthy balanced diet is an important part of maintaining good health and can help you feel your best. This means eating a wide variety of foods in the right proportions and having the right amount of food and drink to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.

A well-balanced diet should contain carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals. Restricting specific nutrients should only be done under the supervision of a health professional. Fluid, ideally in the form of clean water, should be regularly consumed. Meals and snacks should be consumed throughout the day, and portion sizes should be sensible.

Alcohol and drugs

Substances that alter mood or other bodily processes should be limited or avoided. Those with addictive tendencies or other health risks should consider complete abstinence from these substances.

Medical self-care

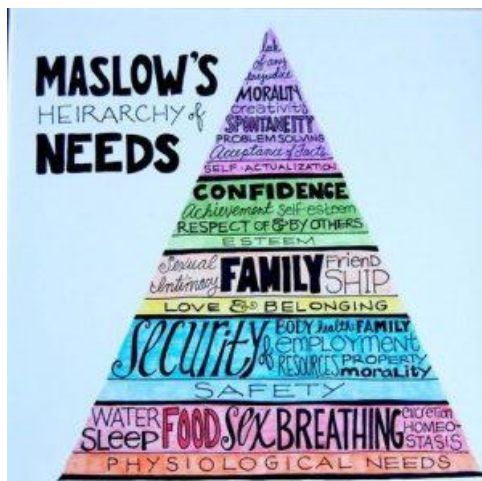
Each individual or family will be allocated a family doctor, known as a General Practitioner (GP). The GP is the first point of contact for all ailments. An appointment can be made by telephoning the surgery.

Basic items, such as bandages, lozenges, and over-the-counter pain-relieving medications, should be easily accessible from home. Long-term coughing, fevers, or other ailments should be addressed through primary care. Emergency treatment should be sought when signs and symptoms are significant or life-threatening.

Rest and sleep

While regular activity is essential for physical health, allowing the body to rest is just as important. Spending time relaxing or taking short naps can help rejuvenate the body. Sleep should take place in a quiet, dark environment and should last approximately 7-9 hours. Consistent sleep that is much shorter or longer than this duration, or is low quality, may need to be addressed by a health professional.

5.2 Mental Health



Many asylum seekers have been seriously affected by their experiences in their home country or while travelling to Ireland.

Be aware of the dangers of mental health problems developing and seek help if necessary. Specialist services, such as for the victims of torture, are available and your doctor can refer you to them if necessary.

Not sure if you or someone you know is living with mental health problems?

Experiencing one or more of the following feelings or behaviours can be an early warning sign of a problem:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and usual activities

- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

Positive mental health allows people to:

- Realize their full potential
- Cope with the stresses of life
- Work productively
- Make meaningful contributions to their communities

What can I do to support my Mental Health?

There are acts of self-care that are proven to help us feel better and get through tough times. This is about you finding what works for you.

- Keeping Active
- Talking about your problems
- Doing things with others
- Eating healthily
- Staying in touch
- Drinking less alcohol
- Looking out for others
- Sleeping well



Where can I go?

For a listening ear and emotional support you can call the Samaritans on 116 123



You can visit www.yourmentalhealth.ie which is a new online resource that contains the most comprehensive online database of mental health support services ever developed in Ireland. The site is a place to learn about mental health and how to support yourself and the people you love. You can find support services near you and learn about the little things that can make a big difference to how you feel.

6 Education

Ireland offers free primary and secondary education to asylum-seeking children. Talk to the accommodation centre management who will help arrange schools for your children.

Education is compulsory for children in Ireland from the ages of six to 16 or until students have completed three years of second-level education.

The Irish education system is made up of primary, second, third-level and further education. State-funded education is available at primary and secondary levels.

Pre-school education is usually provided by a mix of publically and privately funded childcare facilities or providers. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme provides free early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age above the age of three.

6.1 Primary Education



There are a large number of primary schools in the Athlone area and asylum-seeking children have gone to all of them.

Children do not have to attend school until the age of six but it is usual for children to begin school the September following their fourth birthday. Four-year-olds and five-year-olds are enrolled in the junior or senior infant classes.

The curriculum for primary education covers the following key areas:

Language, mathematics, social, environment and scientific education, arts education including visual arts music and drama, physical integration, social personal and health education.

Primary schools are generally privately owned by religious communities (or boards of governors) but are State-funded.

6.2 Second Level Education

Second-level education is provided by different types of post-primary schools. That is, secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools.

In Athlone there are three secondary schools and one community college.

Secondary schools are privately owned and managed. In most cases the trustees are religious communities or boards of governors.

Vocational schools are established by the State and administered by Education and Training Boards (ETB).

Community and comprehensive schools are managed by boards of management of differing compositions.

Athlone's second-level schools are:

- Our Lady's Bower – Retreat road, secondary school for girls
- Marist College – Retreat road, secondary school for boys
- Athlone Community College – Retreat road, community college for both girls and boys
- St. Joseph's College – Summerhill, secondary school for both boys and girls

Second-level education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two-year or three-year senior cycle depending on whether an optional transition year is taken following the junior certificate examination.

Students generally commence the junior cycle at the age of 12. The junior certificate is taken after three years.

Transition year follows the junior certificate examination. This year is free from formal examinations and allows students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience. Transition year can be a very useful experience for many students as it allows them to explore their individual skills and interests.

During their final two years in the senior cycle, students take one of three programmes, each leading to a State examination - the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme or the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

The established Leaving Certificate is the main basis upon which places in universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education are allocated.

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme differs from the established Leaving Certificate in placing a concentration on technical subjects and including additional modules which have a vocational focus.

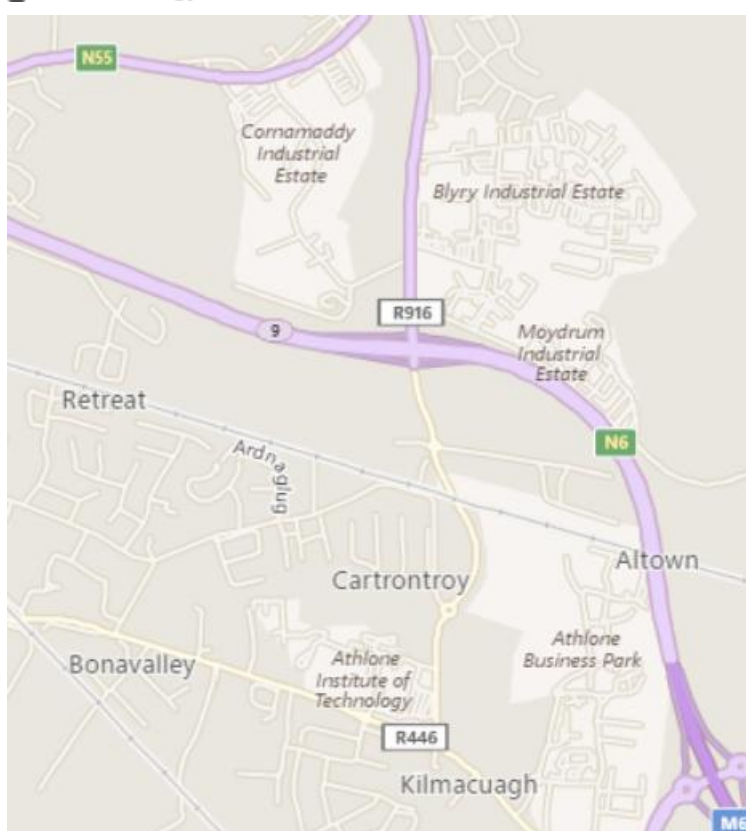
The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme has as its primary objective the preparation of participants for adult and working life through relevant learning experiences. These aim to develop the following areas of human endeavour: spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic and physical.

The Leaving Certificate Applied is not recognised for direct entry to third-level courses but it can enable students to take Post-Leaving Certificate courses.

6.3 Third Level Education

Third-level education is made up of a number of sectors. The university sector, the technological sector and the colleges of education are substantially funded by the State. In addition there are a number of independent private colleges.

Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)



Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) offer a wide range of fulltime, part time and evening third-level courses. These courses are offered in the Business School, the School of Engineering, the School of Science and the Department of Lifelong Learning. For details see <http://www.ait.ie/>

There are seven universities in the republic of Ireland, which are autonomous and self-governing. They offer degree programmes at bachelor, masters and doctorate level.

The technological sector includes institutes of technology which provide programmes of education and training in areas such as business, science, engineering, linguistics and music to

certificate, diploma and degree levels. The Department of Education and Skills has overall responsibility for the sector.

The colleges of education specialise in training for first-level teachers. They offer a three-year bachelor of education degree and a postgraduate diploma.

The training of second-level teachers usually involves completing a primary degree in university or other third-level institution followed by a one-year higher diploma in education. In addition, there are colleges of education that specialise in the training of second-level home economics teachers, teachers of religion and physical education.

Asylum-seeking children who have been in Irish secondary education for five years may be eligible for admission to third-level education on the same basis as Irish-born children. Other asylum seekers are not prohibited from attending third-level courses but they may be asked to pay full foreign fees for the course.

6.4 Further and adult education

Further education comprises education and training which takes place after second-level schooling but which is not part of the third-level system. It includes programmes such as Post-Leaving Certificate courses; the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (second-chance education for the unemployed); programmes in Youthreach for early school-leavers; other literacy and basic education; and self-funded evening adult programmes in second-level schools.

6.5 Special needs education for children with disabilities

Educational provision for students with special educational needs ranges from additional support in mainstream schools to specialist support in special schools. A student with a disability may be enrolled in a:

- Mainstream class with additional support
- Special class in a mainstream school
- Special school which caters for the students with his or her category of disability.

If you have a child with special needs please make contact with your New Horizon volunteer as soon as possible.

7 Asylum-Seeking Process

7.1 Definition of Refugee

The main international body involved in refugee protection is the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

The governing documents are:

- Convention on Human Rights
- Convention on Protection of Refugees

Other relevant conventions exist on racism, human rights, status of women and rights of the child.

UNHCR 'people of concern' are:

- Internally Displaced People (IDP), people who are homeless but who are still in their country of origin
- Refugees, people who are homeless and not in their country of origin
- Returned refugees, people returning to their country of origin

The UNHCR defines a refugee as:

"A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.."

The UNHCR Convention on the protection of Refugees in Ireland is implemented by the Illegal Immigrant (Trafficking) Act (2000), the Immigration Act (2003) and the International Protection Act (2015).

The UNHCR defines a refugee as:

- People who are outside their country of origin
- Unable to return due to a well founded fear of persecution

It is not possible to be granted refugee status in Ireland unless you meet these requirements. If you do not fully meet these requirements it may be possible to be granted subsidiary protection.

Refugee status is designed to protect people who are personally at a high risk to their life or safety if they were returned. For example if you were a prominent political, labour or women's rights activist and the state actively wishes to kill or imprison you. Refugee status is a permanent offer; you will be allowed to remain in Ireland permanently and become an Irish citizen.

Subsidiary protection is for people who are not personally at a high risk to their life, freedom or safety. For example, you are not personally sought by the police but the general conditions in your country, such as war or widespread civil unrest, make it unsafe to return anyone there. Subsidiary protection is granted for a specific period of time, usually three years. If the situation in your home country improves in this period then it may be revised.

Subsidiary protection does not allow for family reunification while refugee status does. Carefully consider whether this is an important issue to you.

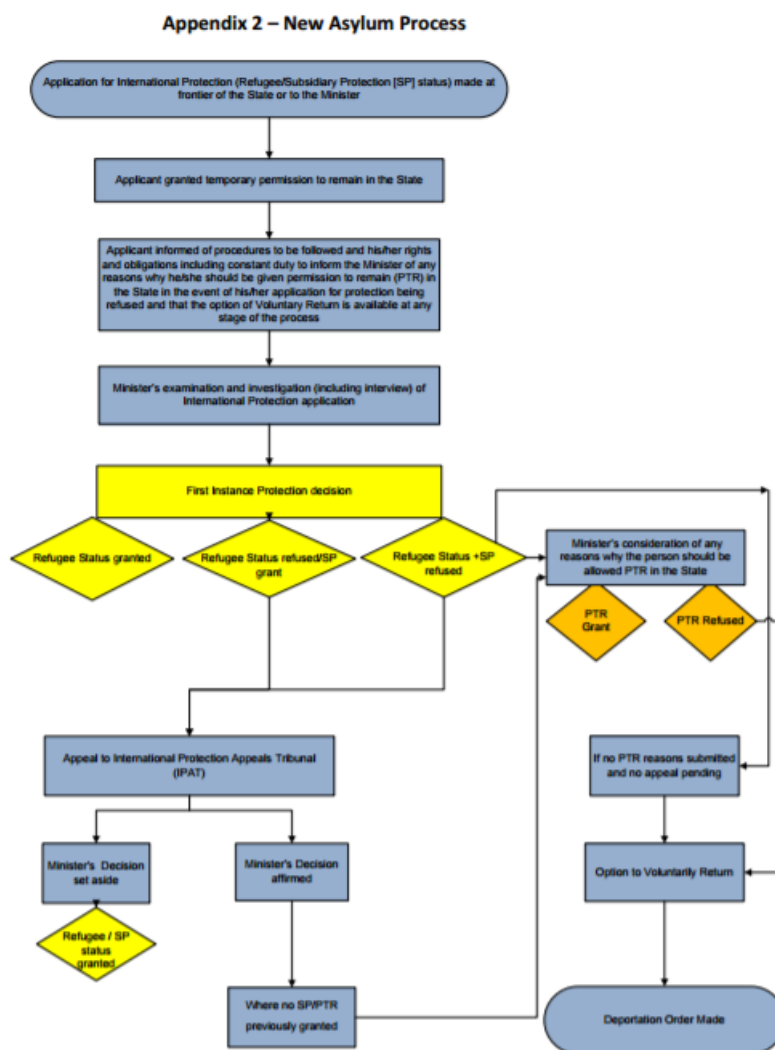
You must show that there is a real threat in the future to yourself, and that you cannot be protected elsewhere in your country. You must also show why Ireland should be responsible for your protection.

Important!

If you have left your country in order simply to find a job or a better life you cannot be classified as a refugee under international law.

Persecution may be on religious, social or ethnic grounds. It may be carried out by a government or government agency. If a person is being persecuted by a non-government agency, refugee status may be obtained if it can be shown that a government agency, such as the local police, has failed to protect them.

7.2 Process Flowchart



In the first instance you make an application for refugee status, usually at the port of entry. You fill out a detailed application form giving a lot of background information.

There may be a brief interview to determine whether your application should be processed in the Republic of Ireland. See the section on Dublin III Convention in this document for more information on this process.

If you are unable to prove your identity you may be detained until this has been established. You and your under-age dependents will be fingerprinted at this stage.

You are then transferred to a direct provision centre for accommodation while your application is processed.

You fill out a detailed application form giving a lot of background information on the reasons you are applying for asylum in Ireland.

Credibility is vitally important. Be sure to give as full and truthful of a report as you can make. Ask for help from a New Horizon volunteer if you are having difficulties.

If you have direct family members that you wish to be reunited with when you get refugee status list them all on your application form. It is important to include direct family members that you have temporarily lost contact with; they may re-appear in the future.

There are some obligations that asylum seekers must comply with:

- You must not leave or attempt to leave the State without the consent of the Minister for Justice while your application is under consideration.
- You are not entitled to seek or enter employment or carry on any business, trade or profession.
- You may be required to report at specified intervals to an Immigration Officer, to a person authorised by the Minister or to a member of the Garda Síochána (Irish Police).
- You are required to reside or remain at the accommodation centre allocated to you by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA)
- You can only move from this accommodation with the permission of the RIA and only in circumstances where the RIA is in a position to offer you alternative accommodation.
- You must be truthful at all times in the information you provide in connection with your application. If you are not, it may lead to a finding that your application is manifestly unfounded. In such circumstances, you would have a shorter period within which to appeal and any appeal you might make would be dealt with without an oral hearing.
- You must co-operate fully with the investigation of your application. Failure to do so could affect the credibility of your application or result in your application being deemed withdrawn.
- You should make all information relevant to your application available to the Refugee Applications Commissioner. If you do not do so and seek to bring forward additional information at appeal stage, you will be required to explain why this information was not made available to the Refugee Applications Commissioner. The Refugee Appeals Tribunal will be required to take this into account in assessing the credibility of your application

After some time, frequently some months, you will be called for an interview with the Refugee Applications Commissioner (RAC). It is very important to be prepared for this interview. See Preparing for the Asylum Interview for more information.

You then attend the Asylum interview. See At the Asylum Interview for more information.

A decision on your asylum application will be made within a few months. You will be informed of the result at this stage.

If your application is successful, congratulations! For help in moving on from Direct Provision see Moving out of the Asylum Process.

If the response is negative you are entitled to appeal to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal. We strongly advise having a legal representative at the tribunal.

The Refugee Legal Service (RLS) is a law centre established by the Legal Aid Board to provide confidential and independent legal services to persons applying for asylum in Ireland. Legal aid and advice is also provided, in appropriate cases, on immigration and deportation matters.

Refugee Legal Services provides a confidential service to all persons who contact it. See <http://www.legalaidboard.ie/en/our-services/legal-aid-services/services-for-asylum-seekers/>

7.3 Dublin III Convention

The Dublin III Convention is an agreement between western European countries on who should be responsible for processing an asylum application.

The Dublin III procedure is used to decide which European Member State is responsible for examining an asylum application. In general the principle is that your asylum application will be processed by the first country that they can prove you entered.

If you have given fingerprints in another member state they are stored in the EURODAC computer system. If you subsequently apply in Ireland your fingerprints will be taken and compared with those in the EURODAC system.

If a match is found you will be removed to this country and your asylum application will happen there. You have no choice about this. Some member states use force to get fingerprints. Other sources of evidence can also be used to prove you came through another member state (for example if you tell them).

Any details you give in interviews about your journey will decide if Dublin III will be used. If you flew directly into Ireland or can prove you came overland without stopping and were unaware you were crossing other member states (for example inside a closed truck), you should not be transferred.

You may be interviewed in person in order to find out which member state is responsible for processing your asylum application. If the Department of Justice decides that your asylum application should be processed in another member state, it requests a transfer. If the second state agrees to take you, you will be informed by letter and the transfer will take place.

Dublin III transfers between Ireland and the UK happen on a regular basis, transfers to other member states are much rarer.

Example: If you apply for asylum in Ireland but say during your interview that you spent three weeks in Spain; you may be transferred to Spain under Dublin III and have to ask for asylum there.

If you tell the authorities that you wish to join your husband, wife or child (children under 18 years can also join siblings), who is an asylum seeker or a refugee in another member state, you may be transferred under Dublin III. This clause is applied very inconsistently between different states.

When the transfer notice has become final, the member states agree on the conditions of the transfer. The entire Dublin III procedure cannot last longer than 11 months. (except when a person flees or if the person is imprisoned). If you have lived for at least 5 months in a member state, this country is responsible for your application.

Dublin III member states are:

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, plus Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

Can I challenge a DUBLIN convention ruling?

Challenging Dublin III cases is very hard, but there are some legal processes against deporting to some other EU countries. If you have been fingerprinted before coming to Ireland, it is very important to ask for advice before you claim asylum.

You might be able to challenge a ruling if:

- The transfer would involve a ECHR Article 3 breach and would lead to inhuman and degrading treatment (this is currently the case for Greece and there are ongoing challenges for other countries in EU).
- If you have family in Ireland
- If Ireland wants to send you to an EU country that is likely to return you to a country that Ireland does not deport people to
- If you have been a victim of torture or you have a serious medical condition, you should not be detained. These are not reasons against a Dublin removal but can give you more time to get advice.

7.4 Preparing for the Asylum Interview

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

The interview is your opportunity to tell your own, personal story about what happened to you in your home country and why you decided to come to Ireland. It is very important to be well prepared for it.

REGISTER WITH THE REFUGEE LEGAL SERVICES

You should register with the “Refugee Legal Service” (RLS) immediately. This service is confidential, independent of the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) and is there to help you.

You can register in writing. Fill out the registration form and send it together to the **Refugee Legal Service**. You find this form as the last page of the information pack you receive from the Department of Justice.

Refugee Legal Service
Smithfield Law Centre
48-49 North Brunswick Street
Georges Lane
Dublin

D07 PEOC

Ireland

Tel:+353 1 646 9600

Fax:+353 1 671 0200

Register as soon as possible, because the RLS will need time to arrange a personal caseworker for you.

If you travel to Dublin for a legal consultation with the Refugee Legal Service, the Community Welfare Officer will give you funding for the travel expenses. In some cases this is only after you come back from the consultation. You need to bring back a letter of proof from your caseworker that you have attended legal consultation and also all travel receipts.

You can contact your Refugee Legal Service caseworker anytime with questions. You should make contact if you change address, or if you receive any correspondence from the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE).

If you have not received legal advice before your interview, New Horizon may be able to give you a letter stating this. Present it to the interviewer on the day of your interview. This letter will then be enclosed in your case file and may be of use later.

IMPORTANT PREPARATION

If you do not have a copy of your “84-Question-Questionnaire”, that you filled out, contact the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) immediately, and ask for a copy.

Important:

Make sure that all of your immediate family members are listed in the application. If they are not it may be difficult to get them admitted on a family reunification visa when your own refugee status is recognised.

A member of the family in relation to a person with refugee or subsidiary protection status means:

- Where a refugee or sponsor is married or in a civil partnership, their spouse or civil partner, providing that the marriage or civil partnership is in existence when the application for family reunification is made;
- Where a refugee or sponsor is under the age of 18 years and is not married, their parents;
- The child of a refugee or sponsor who on the date of the application for family reunification is under 18 years and not married.

Write down your own case story.

Be as detailed as possible. Try to remember every little incident that happened. Maybe it seemed irrelevant at the time, now it is important. Try to remember exact dates of all events and incidents. Write your story exactly in the order as it happened.

Check the questions and **your answers** to the “**84-Question-Questionnaire**” that you had to fill out after you arrived in Ireland. These questions and answers will be reviewed and checked for truth in your interview. Question “84” (why did you come to Ireland seeking refugee status?) will be asked again by the interviewer.

Make sure that your story is consistent with the answers you gave to the questionnaire. If you have made a mistake in the questionnaire tell the interviewer that early in the interview.

Read your story out **aloud** to yourself every day. Even though you will not be able to tell your story exactly this way in the interview, this is your chance to build up your self confidence.

Make a photocopy of every document or letter and every form that you fill out before you send it to the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE).

Try to collect as much written proof as possible about your claim for asylum (for example, death certificate from family member/friend, membership papers of a particular trade union, qualification papers for skills and education and references

If possible and **only if 100% safe**, you can contact family or friends in your home country to request any of these documents. Be very careful not to expose your contact when doing this, it can be very dangerous for them.

Collect specific information about your home country and the political situation at the time you fled. Make sure it relates to your own case. You can collect this information from:

- Books in the library
- Internet (available in the library)

If you need help researching information ask any New Horizon member.

The interviewer will ask you questions like:

- What caused you to leave your country?
- Why did you not move into a different part of your country instead?
- Why did you leave your country last month and not one year ago?

Be sure to have clear answers to these questions.

ATTENDING THE INTERVIEW

When you receive your interview date, inform your community welfare officer (CWO). He or she will give you the money for your trip to Dublin before you go.

In the letter with the interview date, you are asked to fill out a confirmation form. It is important to send it back to the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE).

If you need an interpreter make sure to indicate this on the form. Every reasonable effort will be made to provide an interpreter in your own language.

You can request in writing to be accompanied by an observer. This observer is not a legal representative and cannot speak during the interview. A request for an observer may be refused by the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE).

You can request in advance an interviewer and interpreter of your own gender. If your story involves details that you would not want to discuss with a member of the opposite sex you should request this. This request cannot be refused by the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE).

If you have children, make arrangements for someone to look after them while you are at your interview. The Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) does not provide a person to take care of your child during that time.

7.5 At the Asylum Interview

Remember, you are not automatically entitled to recognition of your refugee status; you must convince the interviewer that you are a refugee under the terms of the Refugee Act.

The interview is your opportunity to tell your own, personal story about what happened to you in your home country and why you decided to come to Ireland. It is very important to be well prepared for it and to do it as well as possible.

GOING TO THE INTERVIEW

You will receive a letter from the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) with the date of the interview. In most cases you will receive it approximately one month before the interview, but sometimes you can receive shorter notice.

It is very, very important, that you go to the interview.

If you absent yourself without reasonable cause, your case will be treated as abandoned. You can only be re-admitted into the asylum procedure if you have valid reasons for your non-attendance. If you fail to go on more than one occasion, the Refugee Applications Commissioner (RAC) will recommend that you should not be declared a refugee.

You have to go to your interview even if you have a minor illness.

If you are seriously ill or cannot travel due to advanced pregnancy contact the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJ) immediately. Get a medical certificate (also known as a sick note) from a doctor and present it to them.

The Interview

The interview will be held in a small office. The only other people present will be the interviewer, and, if necessary, a translator.

Do not be afraid of the interviewer. Make eye contact and smile. Looking away from the interviewer, which is polite in some cultures, may be taken as a sign of evasiveness.

Give full information in reply to questions, not just 'Yes' or 'No' answers. Feel free to have notes and to consult them for details as necessary.

Do not read out answers to questions, it creates the impression of having being coached.

Couples, whether married or unmarried, will be interviewed separately. This is usually on the same day but may be on different days.

The Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) has nobody to look after your child during your interview. You may bring your child into the interview room, but we strongly advise you not to do this. Your child will distract you from the interview questions.

If you have any documents, such as birth or death certificates and references bring them with you. They can help to explain your case to the interviewer. Explain the reasons why you had to leave your country in as much detail as possible. Give exact dates when you speak about events and incidents.

Remember that credibility is very important. If you had good reason to tell lies or use false documents to travel out of your country of origin, it is better to reveal that fact, and explain the reasons for it to the interviewer.

If it emerges later that you deliberately concealed something relevant, your application could be treated as manifestly unfounded. A manifestly unfounded claim is defined as one where the decision maker is of the opinion that the claim is clearly fraudulent.

Typically interviews last between two and four hours. It will not be hostile but it will be challenging. It can be a very emotional and difficult experience as it brings you back to a very difficult part of your life. Feel free to ask for a short break to recapture your thoughts, to drink a glass of water or go to the toilet.

You are legally entitled to an interpreter, but only if it is necessary and possible. The Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) will arrange this. If the interpreter is not available you can refuse to continue. If you are not satisfied with the interpreter, you may refuse to continue the interview. This is better than continuing the interview with a misinterpretation of your story. The interview can be rescheduled if necessary.

While you speak, the interviewer takes notes of your story. At the end of the interview you are asked to sign each page of these notes to certify that this is an accurate record of what you said.

Take your time and read each page very, very carefully

Only sign the pages if you totally agree with the content of each page. If you do not agree with all the contents of the page, make this remark before you sign the page. Make sure that your objection is recorded on the page concerned.

If you are accompanied by an observer, this person is not allowed to speak during the interview. He or she can only take notes. After the interview the observer can then speak and make remarks about the conduct of the interview. For example the observer could indicate if the interview was not held fairly or if certain issues are not understood correctly.

After the interview you have seven working days to make written observations on the interview. It may be possible to submit additional information, such as newspaper cuttings that support your case, at this stage.

You may present additional documents to the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJE) at any time up to the appeal stage. If you want to bring forward additional information at the appeal stage, you will have to explain why this material was not available to the Refugee Applications Commissioner before the appeal hearing.

Moving out of the Asylum Process

Congratulations!

You have passed through the most difficult stage of the process and now have your refugee status or subsidiary protection status recognised.

You now have the right to live and work in Ireland. In most cases, this will mean leaving direct provision accommodation to find work and somewhere to live. The change from direct provision to living independently will involve a great number of issues including housing, employment, health services, managing money and social welfare.

Now it's time to start to rebuild your life. Make an appointment with the Citizens Information centre and start to work with an advice officer who will guide you on how to make the necessary applications.

Documentation

Obtain a GNIB certificate of registration and stamp 4. This stamp allows you to work and claim social welfare benefits. For full information on the Irish immigration system see <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/WP07000207>

Obtain travel documents. People with refugee status are entitled to a refugee travel document. See "Travel documents for people with refugee or subsidiary protection status"

http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/asylum_seekers_and_refugees/refugee_status_and_leave_to_remain/travel_documents_for_refugees.html

Be aware that the UN refugee travel document is the equivalent of a home country, rather than a European Union, passport. You may still be required to obtain a visa for any travel to other EU countries.

If you have refugee status you can apply for Irish citizenship after three years residence. We recommend that you do this as soon as possible; it makes life very much easier.

Family Reunification

Make application for family reunification if required. This can take a considerable time so it's important to start the process as soon as possible. See "Family reunification for refugees in Ireland"

http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/asylum_seekers_and_refugees/refugee_status_and_leave_to_remain/family_reunification_for_refugees_in_ireland.html

For an overview of housing, finance, healthcare, education, employment and other issues see "Guide to living independently"

<http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/GuidetoLivingIndependently.pdf/Files/GuidetoLivingIndependently.pdf>

Housing

If you have been living in a direct provision accommodation centre, you will have to leave that centre and move into other accommodation. This could be in social housing (public housing) or in private rented housing. If you were already living in private rented accommodation, your change of status will not affect your immediate housing situation.

If you find yourself homeless, there are agencies that provide services for homeless people.

Social welfare

When you are granted refugee or subsidiary protection status or permission to remain, you should apply for any social welfare payments for which you are eligible. You will satisfy the habitual residence condition, but you will have to meet other conditions. Your local social welfare office or Intreo centre will help you to apply for the correct payment for your situation.

For example:

- If you are able to work but are unemployed, you may get Jobseeker's Allowance. See Citizen's Information checklist for unemployed people which has links to information about services and entitlements for unemployed people.
- If you are unable to work due to disability or illness, you can apply for Disability Allowance. See Citizen's Information checklist of the main services and entitlements for people with disabilities.
- If you are the parent or guardian of a child you can apply for Child Benefit. If you need childcare, you can view See Citizen's Information childcare checklist.
- If you are parenting alone you can apply for One-Parent Family Payment. You can find out more in See Citizen's Information checklist on the main services and entitlements for people parenting alone.

Employment

You have the right to work, so you may find the Citizen's Information document on looking for work and getting a job helpful.

Your local Intreo centre or employment services office provides information and advice for jobseekers, including a list of job vacancies. The Jobs Ireland website lists jobs that are available. It also lists employment support scheme vacancies.

When you do find work, you should find out about your employment rights, which are protected by employment law. Specific legislation exists to protect your human rights and ensure equality at work and there are procedures to assist you to enforce your employment rights.

Health services

The medical services you received as an asylum seeker will continue if you have been granted refugee or subsidiary protection status or permission to remain. The medical card gives you and your family access to medical services free of charge (some prescription charges apply). If you do not qualify for a medical card, you will be asked to pay for certain medical services. Contact your Local Health Office for details of GPs (family doctors) in your area.

Education

All children and young people, including those granted refugee or subsidiary protection status or permission to remain, are entitled to free primary and post-primary education. You can read more about this and about further and third-level education in the Citizen's Information document on education for people with refugee or subsidiary protection status or permission to remain.

If you are unemployed there are different education and training opportunities that include courses specifically for unemployed people.

Finances

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is a free and confidential service that can help people manage their money.

8 Appendices

8.1 General overview information

- Citizens Information Public Service This site provides information on public services and entitlements in Ireland. Most of the information is in English and Irish but certain pages are available in French, Polish and Romanian. <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/>
- Immigrant Council of Ireland offer support, advice and information about immigration in Ireland. <http://immigrantcouncil.ie/pages/home>
- Irish Refugee Council specialises in working with and for refugees in Ireland. <http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/>
- The Refugee Legal Service (RLS) provide confidential and independent legal services to persons applying for asylum in Ireland. <http://www.legalaidboard.ie/en/our-services/legal-aid-services/services-for-asylum-seekers/>
- Spirasi offers services those who flee torture and severe trauma, through medical diagnoses and therapeutic rehabilitation programs, support and advocacy for those navigating Ireland's legal system, and educational classes. <http://spirasi.ie/>

8.2 Government agencies

- Reception and Integration Agency. This is the government body that deals with the direct provision centres. <http://www.ria.gov.ie/>
- Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner investigates refugee status, subsidiary protection and family reunification application. <http://www.orac.ie/website/orac/oracwebsite.nsf/page/index-en>
- Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) deals with immigration registration. <http://www.garda.ie/controller.aspx?page=31>