

A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service

What does it mean for Children and Young People?

The Children's Rights Alliance welcomes the publication of the Government White Paper on Ending Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service. It marks a watershed moment in terms of our treatment of people seeking protection in Ireland. The priority is now on implementation to ensure this is not just a change on paper but one that truly changes the lives of children and families seeking protection in our country

The Children's Rights Alliance has summarised the White Paper from a children and young person's perspective. The information is taken directly from the White Paper (page numbers in brackets below) and focuses on the issues specifically related to children and young people and their families.

Overview (28)

This White Paper sets out the Government's approach to fulfilling the commitment in the Programme for Government to end Direct Provision and to replace it with 'a new International Protection accommodation policy centred on a not-for-profit approach'.

Underpinning this reform is a commitment that the new system will provide accommodation, health, education, income support and other service needs and will be both professional and grounded in a human rights approach.

Ireland, as a member of the United Nations and of the European Union, is committed to providing safe, lasting refuge to those who seek our protection due to war, persecution and migratory pressures. The White Paper sets out the new permanent, professional and applicant-centred system of accommodation and support for those seeking International Protection status, which will enable the State to fulfil our international commitments now and into the future.

The White Paper is informed by the work of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection process – which was chaired by Dr Catherine Day and which will hereafter be referred to as 'the Advisory Group' – and by the Inter-Departmental Group on International Protection. The Advisory Group Report demonstrated how the current model could be ended and replaced with a system that would be more cost effective. The White Paper sets out a new model which is distinctively different from the system currently in place.

1. A new Approach to Supporting Refugee Families

Guiding Principles (41)

The Government has made a commitment that the process for accommodating those claiming International Protection will be underpinned by a human rights based approach. Applying a human rights based approach will require the new model to be person-centred and to have the capacity to respond to the specific needs of applicants.

The principles underpinning the new model will be as follows:

- Integration from day one: the new model will emphasise supporting people to live independently in Ireland, with applicants offered health, housing, employment, and education supports at the Reception and Integration Centres;
- Human rights and equality based: the rights of applicants will guide the delivery of the model, with a particular focus on children's rights, on dignity, respect and privacy; and on access to the right kind of information and support at all stages of the process;
- Delivery of high standards: the new model will be one characterised by high standards of support, services and assistance which all International Protection applicants can expect to receive;
- Professional: delivery will be undertaken by organisations that will be experienced in delivering accommodation and / or services but also understand equality, diversity, cultural competence and the particular needs of those who have experienced trauma and are fleeing conflict. Their staff will be required to receive cultural competency training on a regular basis;
- Community engagement: communities and not-for-profit organisations will be actively encouraged to become engaged in supporting applicants and their families at each stage of the process. The proposed model is designed to accommodate 3,500 applicants annually, including family members, in line with the projections set out in the Advisory Group Report. Individual strands can be expanded to accommodate sudden increases in the number of applicants.

The proposed model will involve a two-phase approach, whereby the applicant for International Protection is initially accommodated in a Reception and Integration Centre and then in accommodation in the community. The two-phase approach will allow person-centred supports and information to be provided at an early stage.

Phase One: Accommodation in a Reception and Integration Centre (28)

Phase 1: 4 months Accommodation Reception and Integration Centre (0 to 4 months).

- Department and agencies will coordinate services and information in the reception centres. Applicants will be offered an intensive orientation and English language programme similar to that currently offered to programme refugees.
- In Phase One accommodation, the applicant will be accommodated in a Reception and Integration Centre for four months. The focus in Phase One will be on identifying needs, defining pathways, and linking applicants to appropriate services.
- The guiding principle for Phase One will be an approach that seeks to encourage integration from day one, to place people on the most successful pathway possible towards an independent life in Ireland, should their application prove successful.

Phase One: What it means for Families (75)

- If a family applies for accommodation as part of the International Protection process, the family will be offered accommodation immediately in a Reception and Integration Centre. The family will be accommodated during the initial period of four months in an own-door unit in the centre. Here, the family will have the possibility to cook meals and to have living space to spend time together and for the children to play and do homework. The own-door unit will be located in a Reception and Integration Centre where the family will also have access to support services.
- A food-hall will be available with groceries for cooking. Wi-Fi will be available. The family will get a weekly allowance to cover essential needs. The family will also be able to apply for exceptional needs payments where necessary and allowances to cover uniform and book costs for school-going children. If any family members have particular vulnerabilities, these will be taken into account in an assessment process that will identify the services needed. The family will also be linked with support groups and networks that are relevant to their needs and situation.
- Each family will have a caseworker who will ensure that the family is linked with services and who will work with the family on the accommodation option that is offered if the family is expected to need.
- The family will receive a comprehensive orientation and integration programme that will give them a greater understanding of Irish life, opportunities, and entitlements. Adult family members will be expected to attend intensive English language training as a crucial tool for integration and employment opportunities.
- Childcare will be available to facilitate attendance at language and orientation classes. Adult family members will get information on the employment opportunities that they can access once entitled to do so. This will happen if the adult is waiting more than six months for a first instance decision.
- The children of the family will go to school while in Phase One accommodation if they are of school going age. Childcare will be available for younger children.

Phase Two: Accommodation in the Community (29)

If the applicant remains in the International Protection process for longer than 4 months and continues to need accommodation, they will be offered accommodation in an appropriate type of accommodation that will be located in an urban area with access to services and public transport.

In Phase Two, the emphasis is on fostering an independent life within the community. All accommodation in Phase Two will be own-door, self-contained houses or apartments for families to provide privacy, agency and independence. Homes will be situated within the community, with supports to encourage interconnectedness.

Phase 2: What it means for families (76)

- Families will be offered own-door furnished accommodation. This will be either in a house or an apartment. The family will have the same living space and facilities as Irish citizens. They will be able to prepare their own meals. The house or apartment will be located close to clusters of houses or apartments in which other families in the International Protection process are located so that the family will not be socially isolated.
- The location and number of applicants to be accommodated in each county will be determined according to a national settlement pattern that will be developed by the County and City Management Association, in cooperation with the Department of Children, Equality,

Disability, Integration and Youth, and that will take account of applicant needs, population density, housing need and availability of relevant public services in each county

- The family will pay rent for the accommodation on the same basis as an Irish citizen living in social housing. This means that the rent they will pay will be based on the amount of income they have (including their weekly International Protection Payment as well as any earned income) and not on the rental value of the accommodation. This is to ensure they have sufficient income after paying rent to meet their other living expenses. The family can be offered a house or apartment that is either managed by an approved housing body or rented from a private landlord. The family will pay for utilities on the same basis as Irish citizens.
- Each family will have access to a caseworker who will provide information and support to link with health and other services. The level of caseworker support available will depend on whether or not family members have particular vulnerabilities.
- Children will be allocated places in childcare, if of pre-school age, or in mainstream schools if of school-going age.
- The adults will have the right to work if they have not received a decision on their application for International Protection within six months. Adult family members will get the opportunity to link with employment supports and opportunities.
- The family will get an income support if the adults are not working or if the income earned is below a certain threshold. The adult family members will continue to be able to access English language training provided through the local Education and Training Board.
- The family will have access to medical cards.
- If the Vulnerability Assessment indicates that a family member has medical vulnerabilities, these will be brought to the attention of the HSE. For non-medical vulnerabilities, the family will be linked with services or accommodated in a type of accommodation that takes account of those vulnerabilities.
- If a family member has reduced mobility, the family will be housed in an accessible unit, for instance. A family with a disabled member will be linked with disability organisations. A lone parent will be linked with lone parent organisations.
- A family with young children will be linked with family resource centres in the area while those with teenage children will be linked with youth organisations. If the family's application for International Protection is successful, they will be provided with support to transition from the International Protection system into mainstream accommodation.

2. What it means for children

Children in the International Protection System (60)

- Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) which comprise all key statutory and voluntary sector agencies have been very active in terms of provision of services and supports for children in International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) settings.
- In instances where new Reception and Support Centres are located or planned in regions that are served by CYPSCs, this will continue and be further built upon and developed.
- Each CYPSC will ensure as part of its subgroup structure that there is a specific focus on the needs of children, young people and their families in International Protection Accommodation settings. This will involve developing a clear action-focused plan for the coordination and provision of services and supports from CYPSC member organisations to these settings, comprising both in-reach and out-reach approaches. This will also proactively support wider community engagement and child and youth participation.
- This plan will harness the input of Tusla services in the key areas of provision, to include Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, Educational Support Services. The key areas of

Health, Education and Local Authority provision will be included in the plan so that all of these inputs are aligned to best effect for children, young people and their families.

- Crucially a focus will be placed on mobilising the considerable supports from the community and voluntary sector as part of this coordinated provision of services. This will ensure that there is coordinated and concerted planning and delivery of services at regional and local levels for children, young people and their families.
- This plan will be agreed upon by all CYPSC members and their agencies. It will be included in the overall Children and Young People's Plans developed by CYPSCs and implementation will be monitored by the relevant CYPSC. To further strengthen this response, these plans will be shared with the relevant Local Community
- Development Committees (LCDC) to reinforce alignment, implementation and local engagement. At national level, DCEDIY, having regard to all areas in the new departmental remit, will provide strategic policy and systems guidance to CYPSCs to ensure that local structures and supports are fully coordinated and mobilised in response to the needs of children, young people and their family's resident in IPAS settings.

Unaccompanied Minors (61)

- Unaccompanied children's protection applications will be prioritised by decision-makers whenever they are received in order to ensure a first decision before the applicant reaches 18. All young people, where possible, will receive a final instance decision in advance of their 18th birthday, and if this decision is positive they will have the full rights and entitlements afforded to all refugees and citizens. Young people whose application cannot or has not been processed in advance of their 18th birthday will be able to access available State Supports.
- Young people in aftercare will access housing supports in accordance with the new accommodation model, while also continuing to receive aftercare supports in the same manner as currently. Priority access (in line with that for all care leavers) to enhanced housing supports will be given to this cohort of young people leaving care.
- The rationale for when an application for International Protection should be made will be included in the initial needs assessment, and in the child's care plan (if this is not already the case). Access to legal advice and case management will be expanded from current provision in order to keep pace with demand. This includes family reunification applications.

3. Wider Plans that Impact on Children and Families

Interpretation (53)

Many applicants for International Protection require interpretation services to enable them to avail of services and supports and take their first steps in integrating into Irish society. Under the new model of accommodation and supports, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) will ensure that all service-users have access to high quality interpretation services when they need them, at each stage of the process.

English Language Provision and Orientation Programme (53)

During Phase One, adult applicants will have the opportunity to partake in an in-depth educational programme about Ireland which will also teach them about any essential service that they will need to access. The orientation programme will be for four months and will combine information and English language provision. An intensive English language course for adults will be provided as part

of the orientation programme similar to that currently provided to programme refugees under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. Information hubs will be established by relevant services (health / education / child welfare) to provide information on mainstream services and on tailored supports, such as for victims of trauma, including children.

Training for Staff (54)

All staff working with International Protection applicants will receive cultural sensitivity training to develop their cultural competence. They will receive equality and human rights training as well as training on engaging with people who have experienced trauma or torture. They will also undertake the 'Children First' e-Learning programme, which will help them recognise concerns about children and about how to properly report these concerns. They will be required to sign a Code of Conduct. The service provider will be expected to ensure that its staff engage appropriately with applicants and that staff respect the applicants' dignity and human rights. This will be a criterion according to which tenders to provide services under the new model will be evaluated. Similarly, it will constitute a performance metric in terms of service delivery.

Ombudsman / Ombudsman for Children (54)

International Protection applicants will continue to have recourse to the Ombudsman and to the Ombudsman for Children, to pursue an issue of concern about their experiences in the system.

Mental Health (58)

The model of community health care is aligned with *Sharing the Vision – a mental health policy for everyone*.

- Targeted mental health promotion and prevention actions should recognise the distinct needs of applicants for International Protection;
- The HSE should maximise the delivery of diverse and culturally competent mental health supports throughout all services;
- Applicants should have access to appropriate tiered mental health services through primary care and specialist mental health services;
- Interpretation should be provided to enable access to mental health services.
- The mental health needs of people fleeing war, persecution, atrocity, mass violence and other devastating events are different to those of the general population and it is important that this is recognised in the design of mental health supports for those seeking International Protection.
- It is recognised that International Protection applicants may suffer higher rates of anxiety and depressive disorders than other sections of society, and experience up to ten times the level of post traumatic disorder (PTSD) compared to the general population
- Mental health needs will be identified as part of the general Health Assessment and informed by Vulnerability Assessments. Where applicants have mental health needs, including trauma, they will be referred to healthcare professionals with relevant experience, and this will be done in a culturally sensitive manner with appropriate interpretation services.
- Once this assessment has been carried out, appropriate community-based care will be initiated and all relevant information will be communicated to mental health services in a timely manner.
- As applicants commence the move to Phase Two accommodation, their mental health support and treatment requirements will be factored into the type and location of their

accommodation, to ensure both continuity of treatment and living arrangements that are appropriate for their needs.

Vulnerability Assessments (60)

The EU Recast Reception Conditions Directive sets out the requirement to take account of the specific situation of vulnerable persons in terms of their reception needs. A Vulnerability Assessment process will be in place, building on the current pilot vulnerability screening and assessment process with which the HSE is supporting DCEDIY. This involves an assessment of vulnerability at the initial stage of application for International Protection (carried out in parallel with the International Protection application process at the International Protection Office (IPO)). The outcome of this screening will be a supported referral to the health team, where necessary. The Vulnerability Assessment process will determine the accommodation and support options offered to the applicant. The caseworker assigned to the applicant in Phase One will have a role to ensure that vulnerabilities are taken into account in determining the type of accommodation appropriate to the applicant's needs and the level of support needed. Where further vulnerabilities emerge following initial screening and assessment, the assigned caseworker will notify appropriate services and will arrange for further assessments to be undertaken as necessary. The ongoing assessment of vulnerabilities is an important part of the overall process and the caseworker will be important in the case management process and in ensuring a coordinated approach to the provision of services.

Economic and Family Supports: Phase One: Reception and Integration Centre (64)

While in the Reception and Integration Centre, applicants will receive full board and have access to an onsite food hall to get food where catering for themselves. Residents will be involved in decisions around which food is provided in the food hall, with particular consideration given to any specific religious or cultural needs. They will also receive an Expenses Allowance that will be paid weekly. It will be of similar value to the current Direct Provision Allowance. This rate will be reviewed annual basis.

Economic and Family Supports: Phase Two: Accommodation in the Community (64)

Phase Two living expenses will be paid in the form of a weekly International Protection Payment from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Applicants in Phase Two who have dependent children will also receive an additional monthly payment per child in the form of an International Protection Child Payment from DCEDIY. Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances will also be payable where applicable, as is currently the case.

These have been calculated on the basis that the rate of the International Protection Payment will be aligned with that of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance, while the rate of International Protection Child Payment will be aligned with that of Child Benefit.

Childcare and Parenting (65)

Parenting supports and child development services will be made available to applicant families to support child development during the application for International Protection. It is recognised, in this regard, that applicant families who have experienced conflict or trauma may need additional supports. Caseworkers' work with applicant families will include specific supports for people who have been trafficked and suffered gender-based violence. It is also recognised that moving from a third country to Ireland may in itself impose additional pressures on the applicant family which, if

ignored, may lead to poorer outcomes for applicant children. Childcare will be provided to enable parents to attend English language classes.

Women's Health (58)

- Of particular importance is access to quality sexual and reproductive healthcare. All women and girls of reproductive age will have the information and means to protect themselves from unplanned pregnancy and STIs. They will have access to information and means to control their fertility. All women of reproductive age will be provided with information on access to termination of pregnancy services in Ireland and where access to these services is required IPSS caseworkers will ensure that the service is accessed in the most timely and dignified manner possible.
- IPSS Caseworkers will ensure that where requested, women and girls can access a female GP or clinician.
- Period products will be provided to International Protection applicants who need them, free of charge in Phase One accommodation.

Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (59)

Health and social care supports will be made available to women, children and men who are victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Victims of female genital mutilation, torture and human trafficking will receive appropriate health and social care services. International Protection applicants who move away from abusive relationships will be assured that their application will not be affected. All IPSS caseworkers will be trained as part of the Vulnerability Assessment process to identify women and girls who have experienced or are at risk of female genital mutilation. For those who have been subjected to FGM, a referral to an NGO-run FGM Treatment Service will be offered.

Pathways for People with a Disability (62)

The Vulnerability Assessment process will be used to determine the accommodations that are needed for people with disabilities. Where the person has a mobility difficulty, this will be taken into account when determining the potential accommodation option for that person. The availability of suitable services, including accessible transport services, and school places will also be taken into account for applicants with disabilities or for families who have children with additional educational needs. Where the nature of the disability requires the applicant to access medical services, the Vulnerability Assessment process will bring these needs to the attention of the HSE. This will include needs arising from mental health issues. Applicants and their families will also be linked to disability support networks so that they can become aware of services and initiatives.

Post-Decision Transitions: Successful Applicants (65)

People who are granted international protection will be offered supports to assist them with the transition to permanent living in Ireland. The nature of supports offered will vary according to need. One model that may be drawn on in developing a programme of transition supports is the Support to Live Independently (SLI) initiative. This is a visiting support service to those with low or moderate needs who are moving into independent accommodation having been in homeless services. This service provides wraparound supports to assist individuals and families to integrate into their new community while also helping them to access employment, education and social protection services.

The potential to mobilise community support for people moving out of the International Protection system will also be explored. The engagement of people who have themselves come through the

international protection system in the past and are successfully integrated into life in Ireland could be of great value to this aspect of the new model.

Post-Decision Transitions: Unsuccessful Applicants (65)

Unsuccessful applicants will have time to regularise their affairs and support will be given to them to enable them to avail of options for voluntary return to their countries of origin.

Inspection (66)

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) will monitor existing Centres against agreed standards during the transitional period. HIQA's expertise will be sought to develop a robust inspections system for the new model. The inspections system will combine internal inspections by Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth or by a company contracted on its behalf and external inspections by an independent body. The inspections system will have to encompass a wider variety of accommodation units than at present and a greater number of service providers contracted to provide services and supports to applicants. Work will be undertaken during the transitional system on developing the new inspections system

Independent Review of Wellbeing Indicators (71)

As the new model is established, there will be a need to ensure that it is fully meeting the needs of people applying for International Protection. One of the repeated criticisms of Direct Provision is that problems were allowed to escalate and become chronic before being addressed. The new model must ensure that it identifies and addresses issues affecting applicants' wellbeing at the earliest possible stage. Additionally, it is imperative that the new model takes a holistic view of wellbeing, rather than the focus on accommodation which characterised RIA and IPAS.

An independent body of experts will work with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY) to develop a set of wellbeing indicators for people in the International Protection system. The independent body will assess these indicators at regular intervals.

Implementation, Governance and Risk (80)

Implementation of the new model is a whole of Government responsibility. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) will have responsibility for coordinating the implementation

Implementing the new model proposed in the White Paper will be the responsibility of a new unit to be established in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. This unit is referred to as the "Transition Team" in this White Paper.

The Transition Team will manage the transition to the new model. As part of its work, the Team will, in consultation with key stakeholders and informed by its experience of the transitional period, design the optimal implementation structure for the new model in its 'steady state', i.e. once the transition has been completed and the new model is fully in place.

An external advisory group of three independent persons will be appointed by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to monitor the implementation of the new model. They will publish reports periodically to report on the progress of the reforms and to highlight any concerns arising. The Terms of Reference of the Inter-Agency Working Groups

established under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme will be expanded to include its new role in relation to the new model at local level. These Groups, which are chaired by the relevant Local Authority, will provide periodic reports to the Programme Board. An annual meeting will be held between representatives of inter-agency working groups and Programme Board representatives to facilitate the exchange of good practice and to identify ways in which coordination can be improved at local level