



Impact Report 2023





Image 1
Participants at the IRC International Women's Day event in Dublin.

Image 2
#RefugeesWelcome:
Irish Refugee Council staff at the national solidarity rally early last year.

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Images:

Top: IRC CEO Nick Henderson pose for a photo with IRC Board Chair at the launch of 30 Years 30 Voices: The Power of Protection book on World Refugee Day.
Bottom: IRC staff and trustees pose for a photo after receiving the Charity of The Year award.



FOREWORD

Doireann Breathnach

Board Chair

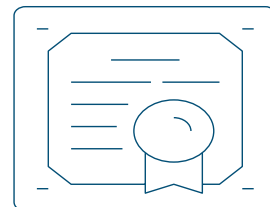
2023 was an extremely challenging year for the Irish Refugee Council. We witnessed a disturbing decline in the treatment of people escaping persecution and violence. The most striking manifestation of this was street homelessness for people seeking protection, a situation that continues. Worryingly, the voices that seek to cause division and hate in Ireland also became louder. They challenge the very concept of offering protection and target refugees as the source of social ills. Despite these challenges, communities and individuals across Ireland stepped up to support people. There are countless stories, many untold, of positivity, success and inspiration. It is these that will endure, not the actions of an extreme minority.

I am extremely proud of the work and impact of the Irish Refugee Council. Through the relentless determination and commitment of our staff, we serve and champion the individual in so many ways, as demonstrated in this impact report. We provided substantial support to 20,890 people. Our work received significant recognition when we were awarded Charity of the Year by Charities Institute Ireland in October. This could not be done without the help of the many people, foundations and companies who support our work.

Human dignity cannot be diminished by those who wish to create fear of vulnerable groups. Irish values cannot and will not be defined by those who seek to be exclusionary and racist. This is my last year as a member of the board after a seven-year term and I am prouder than ever that the Irish Refugee Council is an organisation that fights for the vulnerable and for the individual knowing that every human story deserves dignity.

HIGHLIGHTS

Charities Institute Ireland
Charity of the Year.



20,890 **people received substantial support.**

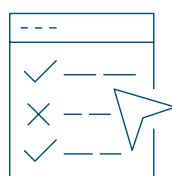


27,899 incoming calls to our helplines.

10 new High Court
Judicial Review cases.

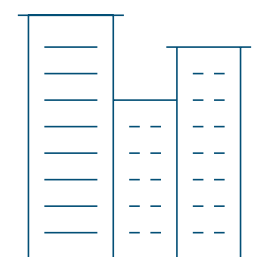
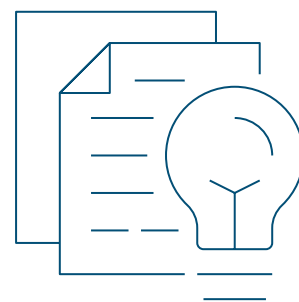


3 cases were selected
as lead cases in respect
of protection applicants
experiencing homelessness.



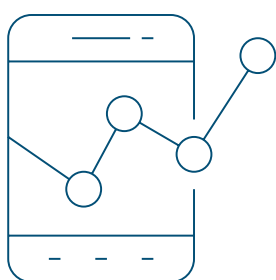
354 women enrolled
for upskilling programmes.

550 clients received legal representation on reception conditions issues.



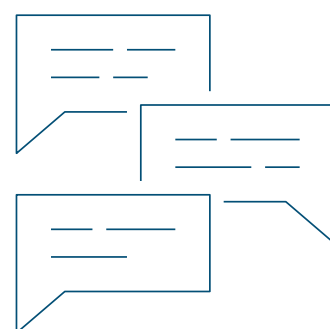
Assisted 598 people at risk of homelessness.

104 people accommodated through our **A Place to Call Home** programme.



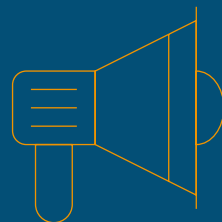
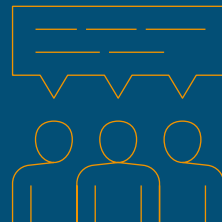
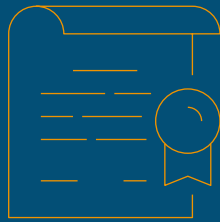
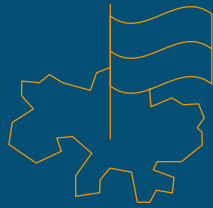
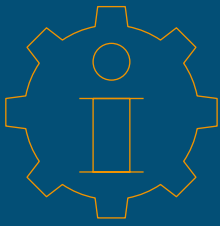
243 appearances in local and international media.

195 young people engaged across groups, projects, and one-to-one support.



IMPACT REPORT

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS





Information and Advocacy Service

Providing information and support, for free, in a timely and confidential manner

20,405 incoming calls to our general helpline.

459 homeless people supported.

1,529 cases on Salesforce responded to.

164 family reunification applications supported.

2,666 email queries responded to.

598 people at risk of homelessness assisted.



Hanna Dwyer
Information and
Advocacy Service
Manager

2023 was a challenging year for the Information and Advocacy Service

(IAS) due to increased demand, coupled with deteriorating conditions in International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) centres as well as the first wave of “mass homelessness” among male International Protection applicants (IPAs).

We met with 459 homeless IPAs, referring cases to our Law Centre to pursue legal challenges in the Courts. For those in accommodation, we saw conditions continue to decline throughout the year.

Despite the pressures on our service, our IAS team conducted outreach to 20 IPAS centres, across eight counties, reaching 334 people with information.

Our focus was delivering information on the international protection process, but we also gave an overview of rights and entitlements. In some cases, we discussed accommodation conditions.

While we still provided information via the helpline, the increased demand for services meant we had to consider new ways to deliver our work. We automated our data recording and elements of relationship management, produced explainer videos for service users, and supported local groups supporting IPAs and refugees with relevant training—measures that allowed us to reach more people with essential information.

In 2023, we also saw some positive decisions issued with respect to Afghan Admissions Programme applications and, families finally arriving to Ireland based on family reunification applications.

However, most families experienced significant delays waiting for their family reunification applications to be processed and had not seen each other for many years by the time they were finally reunited.



Ukraine Response

Linking those fleeing the war in Ukraine with vital information

3,495 incoming calls to our Ukraine Language Helpline.

2,773 people received information support through the helpline.

5,500+ people supported through outreach.

112 outreach sessions across Ireland.

1,508 email queries responded to.

1,300 individuals supported after outreaches.



Law Centre

Providing expert legal advice and representation to people fleeing war and persecution

10 new High Court Judicial Review cases

with 3 cases selected as lead cases in respect of international protection applicants experiencing homelessness.

Referral of 13 clients to A & L Goodbody for representation in international protection applications, and 6 Family Reunification applications.

Ongoing legal representation for 134 people in the international protection process.

Representation provided to 550 clients in Reception Conditions.

67 clients represented in family reunification applications.

21 age-disputed minor clients supported in age assessment process.



Katie Mannion
Managing Solicitor,
IRC Independent Law
Centre

In Spring 2023, the Law Centre represented 10

newly arrived international protection applicants in High Court Judicial Review proceedings, challenging the State's failure to provide them with reception conditions, leaving them in a situation of street homelessness and destitution. The High Court judge chose to hear two of the Law Centre clients' cases as lead cases, to identify the legal issues and entitlements, which were relevant to many of the international protection applicants who continued to experience homelessness.

Our client, SY, fled Afghanistan due to the Taliban and arrived in Ireland when he was 17 years old. He was not offered accommodation and received only a one-off Dunnes voucher. As a result, he experienced street homelessness, had no access to basic hygiene conditions, was threatened with a knife attack, robbed of €5, and felt afraid, hungry, ashamed, and humiliated.

Mr. Justice Meenan concluded that, by failing to provide reception conditions, the Minister had breached his obligations under the Reception Conditions Regulations and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, in particular Article 1 which recognises that "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected". He granted Declarations that those rights had been breached. By June 2023, all newly arriving international protection applicants were offered accommodation.

Another of the Law Centre's cases was chosen as one of two lead cases in respect of the matter of Damages for failure to provide material reception conditions and was heard by the High Court in November 2023. The judgment, issued in December 2023, emphasised that "the State remains under a continuing, mandatory obligation to provide international protection applicants with basic needs including accommodation on an uninterrupted basis from the point at which qualifying persons apply for international protection". In February 2024, Mr. Justice Ferriter referred the question of whether force majeure is available as a defence to a breach of an EU law obligation based on the fundamental right to dignity to the Court of Justice of the European Union. It could take 18 months for a decision on this.



Navigating the international protection system: Happiness' Story

Happiness, a Zimbabwean by birth, sought protection in Ireland in 2021. Her decision to flee was prompted by harrowing abuse, including imprisonment and death threats from her politically influential ex-husband and his family. Battling ghosts from the past and life as a protection applicant, her early days were characterised by mistrust, anxiety, and depression.

"I had no knowledge of the process of asylum application, and it took a toll on my mental health. I was overwhelmed that I had made it alive so far away from home and uncertain if I was completely safe. I was initially skeptical about sharing my story, not sure who to trust and if I would be exposed to my perpetrators..."

"My time in quarantine was the most stressful, alone and wondering how my daughters, whom I left back home, were doing and if they would be safe. At some point, I felt like a coward for saving myself and not my children, wondering if anything happened to them would I forgive myself."

Knowing she needed help, Happiness started by seeking counselling. It was from her counsellor that she heard about the IRC. Happiness contacted the IRC Independent Law Centre for help with her application and the Education team for assistance with enrolling in Higher and Tertiary Education.

"I received great support in filling out and understanding questions in my application and submitted through my solicitor. At this stage, I felt a ray of hope as I could ask and communicate with my solicitor about any concerns I had."

"I had both emotional and legal support from the Law Centre. I had two hearings. On both occasions, my solicitor went in with me to support me. Even after my results, which I was not satisfied with, my solicitor helped me arrange for an appeal. The process was so smooth, and knowing you had someone for support was relieving. The Law Centre is a people-centred service, and it makes it easy for you to tell your story at ease."

Speaking about the education supports, Happiness said, "The lady in the (IRC) Education department referred me to the UCD mature student programme and that was the beginning of my educational journey. I had loads of financial support for resources and transportation."

Happiness now has refugee status and will soon be reunited with her daughters. She is working as a Social Care worker while pursuing BSocSC Sociology and Social Policy at UCD, and dreams of helping women facing abuse worldwide.



The Law Centre is a people-centred service, and it makes it easy for you to tell your story at ease.



Housing Programme

A Place to Call Home: Homes for refugees as they build their new lives in Ireland

2 new properties acquired, bringing the total number of properties to 18.

104 people now accommodated by the Housing Programme.

7 new tenants moved into the new properties.



Housing Casework and Policy

Supporting people to transition from Direct Provision

773 people provided with information and advice. **Delivered two** outreach training sessions.

183 housing applications submitted.

286 people facing homelessness supported.

Launched our **Student Housing Support** Befriending Programme.

78 families who arrived through family reunification supported on arrival.

Conducted weekly housing application workshops, Horn of Africa support clinics, and bi-weekly tenancy-finding workshops.



Education Programme

Removing barriers to access Further and Higher Education

298 applications for financial support received.

78 students were awarded financial grants via our Education Fund.

1 training session conducted to support people working in the sector.

8 online information sessions for students and potential students held.



Employment

Supporting people to understand their labour rights and enter the Irish labour market

148 women enrolled for Integration From Day One programme.

98 women completed the programme, and 15 of them received individual support.

120 women compared to 105 in 2022 received individual employment coaching.

354 women compared to 30 in 2022 enrolled for upskilling programmes.

27 women progressed to sustainable employment.

50 women compared to 12 in 2022 supported to secure internships.

9 collaborations with employers.

17 peer group support sessions.



From Nigeria to Mayo: How Carolyn Found a New Purpose in Ireland

Carolyn worked as a banker for 15 years in her home country, Nigeria. She recalls only crossing her country's borders for work and holidays—well-planned, brief, and cherishable trips. October 2022 was different. Carolyn and her kids left hastily without a known destination fleeing political persecution. Forced to travel irregularly, it took them two months to arrive in Ireland.

“My life changed in a way I could never have imagined. It gave me a totally different identity, all three of us living in one room (in Ireland) in an environment where we were the only black people. It brought lots of questions and no answers. How did I get to this point? When and how will I be able to work and feel normal again?”

“My children would be asking, ‘Mum, what’s happening, and when will we be in school?’. It wasn’t easy psychologically for all of us. I was on different types of anti-depressants for the first three months.”

During her fourth month, Carolyn heard about the Integration From Day One, a project under our Employment programme that supported women in protection to gain the confidence, skills, and cultural competence they needed to rebuild a life in Ireland.

“I met a lady who had been through the programme. From the day I started, it was rejuvenation after rejuvenation. Initially, everyone in the group was quiet, but Amaka and Gavin (IRC Programme Facilitators) made us all burst out.”

After each class, she pushed herself to act on the knowledge she received.

“They taught us how to edit our CVs to suit the new environment and helped me prepare for interviews. Amaka would be very plain about the need to stop isolating and be open to learning things, including the Irish culture. I learnt how to engage without overstepping boundaries.

“I started attending church and told them I was a reader before leaving Nigeria. I have been reading since. With every ‘you read very well’ compliment and class attended, I became confident again to do and engage more.

“I soon realised the suspicion we initially experienced was because we didn’t know each other. Otherwise, the community is very supportive. After a banking career of 15 years, I needed something new. I have found a new love in healthcare, which I had no idea could be a profession before leaving.”

Carolyn now holds a QQI Level 5 in Healthcare Certificate, Customer Service Training, and another QQI Level Five Working with Groups Qualification paid for by her children’s school. She works as a healthcare assistant in Mayo while also supporting parents whose children are coming into the school for the first time voluntarily.



I have found a new love in healthcare, which I had no idea could be a profession before leaving.

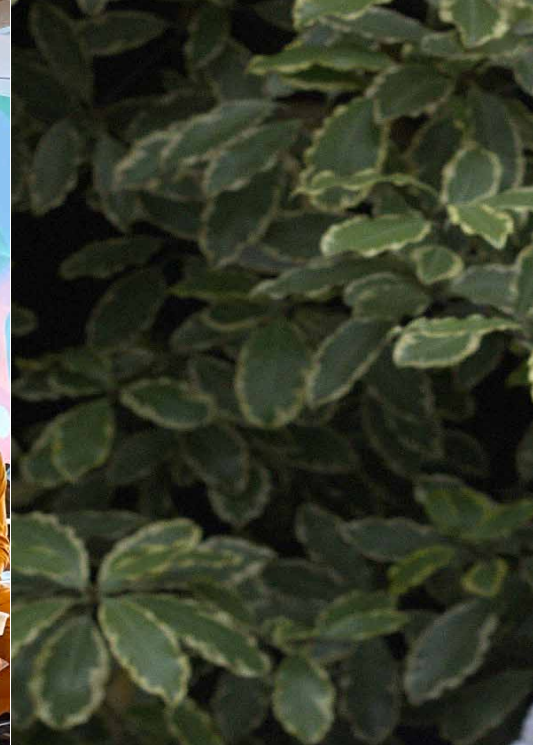


Image L-R:

A panel of young collaborators speaking at the launch of Tight Spaces.

A young person we support holds a flower during a day trip to Airfields Estate.

Exploring the intersectionality of education and racism through theatre: Our Youth Group members performing.



Youth Work

Empowering young people in the international protection process to cope and integrate

324 queries responded to.

195 young people engaged.

110 young people supported one to one.

9 trainings, talks and outreach sessions delivered.

48 activities and workshops delivered.

3 projects implemented.

5 young people engaged in our leadership programme.

9 collaborations with relevant organisations and individuals.

Launched Tight Spaces, a resource on the experience of Direct Provision by young people.



From Isolation to Belonging: Gabe's Journey with IRC Youth Group

I'm 24. I came to Ireland last March. The first month or two, I felt it was difficult to make friends. Even though the people I lived with were nice, they all had their friends. My roommates were much older; there was very little to talk about. I felt alone in the middle of a big new city.

Being part of the LGBTIQ community, I initially tried joining their meetings but soon realised our concerns were different. Mine were about safety and stability. How am I going to stay in Ireland? Can I work, can I study? How scared I was back home and here that people might find out and do something to me? Theirs were about making an impact, self-fulfilment, and raising awareness, as they were mostly European and Irish, things that I might think about later.

Then, I got to know about the IRC Youth Group. By participating in the Youth Group, I got to know about Ireland and made friends from different countries. Some had just arrived; others had been here a long time. Even though we had different levels of English, we could easily find topics to talk about.

In summer, we would hang out, eat, play music, and play games. Those are the things we enjoyed back home. Finally, we had the time, the space, and the people to do them with here.

Apart from the friendships, IRC helped me with work placement. The experience improved my skills in working with people from different cultures and backgrounds and helped me get a job as an AI Annotator in an international tech firm. The job was my dream job before leaving my home country. Funny enough, that changed after meeting Natasha and Aoife (IRC Youth Workers). I now want to be there for other people who might be anxious coming to Ireland too. I'm studying Social Care now—a course I picked because IRC took us to YMCA, and Natasha helped me with the information I needed.



Community Sponsorship

Supporting communities to welcome refugees

17 community sponsorship groups supported and trained to welcome resettled people directly to their communities.

9 trainings and information sessions delivered to communities across Ireland.

15 people welcomed to Ireland by 3 community sponsorship groups.

3 radio campaigns.

Participated in **5 international conferences** including one we co-hosted.



Resettlement

Supporting Syrian and Afghan refugees to rebuild their lives in Ireland

114 queries on family reunification, travel documents, and citizenship resolved.

4,750 queries from 1,300 in 2022 were responded to over phone, email and WhatsApp.

2 cases of domestic violence and 5 families supported with conflict resolution.

3 trainings (including two in-person) for resettlement workers in Ireland delivered.

13 cultural orientation sessions delivered online and in person.

14 interpreter training programme sessions delivered.

8 outreach sessions across Ireland.

6 cooking class sessions with women from refugee backgrounds and corporates



From Limbo to a New Life: Salim's Story of Perseverance and Achievement

Salim arrived in Ireland in 2016 from Lebanon, where he had spent four years in limbo after fleeing war in his home country, Syria.

Before his forced departure, Salim worked as a jewellery graphic designer and helped at his family's transportation business.

"Syria was a beautiful country. Families and neighbours united. One night, we sat watching TV as a family, and then the next morning, there were bombings everywhere. Suddenly, everything changed. We left everything behind. I still wonder what happened," he said.

"When I left with my mother, sister, and her three kids, there were dead people everywhere. My sister's husband was missing. It was like a dream," recalls Salim.

In Lebanon, the family was among the millions of refugees the country was struggling to host. The family registered with UNHCR for resettlement as Lebanon provided no pathway for citizenship and employment prospects. When they heard back, only he and his mother had been chosen to resettle in Ireland.

"They (UNHCR) said you go first; we will take care of your sister, and she will join you later."

A few weeks stretched to years. He reached out to many with no results. In the interim, he struggled to cope with the demands of a new life in Ireland and meet his sister's needs in Lebanon.

"My mother is disabled. In Syria, our house was always busy; neighbours, cousins, and friends came in to help.

When we moved here initially, it was just me and my mother. I was doing everything: cleaning, shopping, cooking, and taking her to the hospital with no car. It was very difficult for me. I needed to send money to my sister and learn English."

"A few weeks after we arrived, your team visited us. Hassina (IRC Resettlement Officer) helped me apply for reunification. She put in many hours, and because she speaks Arabic, explaining my emotions and what I needed help with was very easy. I don't want to say much, but my sister and her children would probably still be in Lebanon if it were not for her. We eventually found her husband and his visa was approved this February, thanks to Monika (IRC Caseworker)."

Salim was reunited with his sister and nieces in 2019. She is now their mother's primary caregiver while he works as a driver for An Post.

"That was my dream job in Ireland, and thank God, I now have it. I passed all the tests the first time except the CPC (Certificate for Professional Competence). Seven times, I failed. I kept saving the money and going back. It was hard for me because it's scenarios with no answers, and when I arrived, I could only say, 'Hi, how are you?'" said Salim, who has successfully added English as a fourth language.

The Irish Refugee Council Resettlement Programme supports individuals and families brought to Ireland under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.



That was my dream job in Ireland, and thank God, I now have it.



Policy and Advocacy

Advocating for best practice, fair procedures and the rights of people seeking international protection

Publication of 'Now I Live On The Road' report on homelessness and ongoing advocacy work on deterioration of standards in IPAS accommodation.

Published the research, 'Accommodation: Exploring the Experiences of Families and Children in Direct Provision'.

Budget Submission calling for the extension of Child Benefit or an equivalent payment to children in the international protection process.

Coordination of the Asylum Support Network, with over 257 active members from 90 organisations across Ireland.

4 Activists and Advocates workshops benefitting 100+ people from refugee and migrant backgrounds delivered.

Authored the AIDA (Asylum Information Database) country report for 2023.

Image: Participants discussing influencing ideas at our Activists and Advocates workshop last summer.



Communications

Delivering strategic communications to promote the dignity and rights of people in international protection

Production and launch of '30 Years, 30 Voices: The Power of Protection' to mark IRC's 30th Anniversary.

3 online and offline sessions with schools speaking about IRC's work.

243 appearances and mentions in community, national, and international media.

6,000 new social media followers.

7 press releases.

3 campaigns.

Image: President Michael D Higgins and wife, Sabina, pose for a photo with IRC staff and board chair after receiving a copy of the 30 Years 30 Voices: The Power of Protection book launched on World Refugee Day.

THANK YOU

The support of individuals, foundations, trusts and companies allow us to have the impact demonstrated in this report.

When somebody walks through our door we do not know where their journey with us will go. From giving them crucial information and support about their international protection application, to stopping them from being returned to persecution, to education and employment pathways.

We are a small independent charity that relies on donations and external funders, and as the demand for our services continues to grow, we need that support more than ever.

In 2023, 14% of our funding came from the State. In 2024, we are projecting that figure to be around 16%.

We want to thank everyone who has donated to support our work, no matter the amount, we could not do our work without you!

We are also grateful of the invaluable support of the following donors and funders:

The Atlantic Philanthropies	International Catholic Migration Commission
One Foundation	
A&L Goodbody	The Ireland Funds
AIB	Irish Youth Foundation
Amazon Web Services	Irish Life
AMIF, The Asylum Migration and Integration Fund	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
Apple	KIND Incorporation
Bank of Ireland	Lakeside Foundation
BT Ireland	Lovely things
Community Foundation for Ireland	Microsoft
Coillte	Mount Street Club Trust
Department of Justice	Musgrave Trust
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	National Youth Council of Ireland
Department of Community and Rural Development	Pobal
DLA Piper	Rethink Ireland
Dropbox	Sisters of Mercy
European Council on Refugees and Exiles	Sky Ireland
EY	St Stephens Green Trust
Google	Standard Life
	Sunflower Foundation
	The Wheel
	Workday



Image 1
World Refugee Day-attendees pose for a photo at the World Refugee Day event.

Image 2
IRC staff attending a housing rally to end evictions.

Image 3
IRC staff pose for a photo at the office with the Charity of the Year award.



Connect with us:

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