



“

# IF I DON'T DO THIS THEN IT WON'T BE DONE

Volunteering with Homeless Protection Applicants.





# Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
Background	8
Methodology	9
Survey Respondents	10
Survey Responses	12
Discussion	30
Recommendations	33
Annex 1	36
Annex 2	37
Annex 3 - Timeline of volunteer activities from Volunteer Record	38
Annex 4 - Survey Form	42

This report is produced with the support of the St Stephen's Green Trust

The Community Foundation support the Irish Refugee Council's work on reception conditions

The One Foundation support the Irish Refugee Council's policy, advocacy and communications work





Photo credit: Rory O'Neill

## Executive Summary

### Background

Since 2023, the Irish Government has reneged on its obligations under Irish and European Union law to provide accommodation on arrival to people applying for international protection. This has led to a crisis of single, male protection applicants being forced to live rough on the street, without access to basic services. In response to this failure of state services, local community volunteer groups have evolved to provide essential goods and support to those seeking protection who are living rough.

To better understand the needs of people seeking protection who have been forced to live rough in Dublin, the Irish Refugee Council surveyed community members who volunteered between January 2023 and October 2024.

The survey focused on the experiences of local community volunteers providing basic support to homeless people seeking protection, independent of government or NGO support. The research questions that guided this work were:

1. What are the greatest needs of people seeking protection experiencing homelessness?
2. What support have local volunteers provided to people seeking protection experiencing homelessness?
3. What is the response of the Irish state to people seeking protection experiencing homelessness?
4. What safety concerns are there: a) for people seeking protection experiencing homelessness?; and b) for local community volunteers?
5. How do state organisations react to safety concerns of people seeking protection and community volunteers?

### Key Findings

#### **People seeking protection experiencing homelessness have complex needs that are not being met by the state**

Protection applicants living rough do not have direct access to essential supports through the state, such as food, water, accommodation, sanitation or hygiene facilities. Supports indirectly funded by the state are clearly insufficient to meet demand. In addition, protection applicants have limited access to health and social care, or to adequate financial aid. Through being made homeless by the state, they are subject to heightened vulnerabilities and are at risk of violence and abuse.

#### **Volunteers provide essential supports to people seeking protection experiencing homelessness**

Community volunteers provide meaningful aid in the form of food, clothes, tents and shelter. They also carry out casework and advocacy, linking protection applicants to homeless and state services, and advocate for the allocation of emergency accommodation to highly vulnerable applicants. This support is self-funded and self-organised by community groups in response to the high deprivation of people seeking protection.

#### **The response of the Irish state to homelessness among international protection applicants is contradictory, wasteful and inhumane**

The state fails to provide impactful support to protection applicants living rough. Applicants are directed to receive tents by state funded charities, only to be told there is nowhere they can pitch them, and subsequently have those tents destroyed by companies employed by state bodies such as Waterways Ireland. State bodies do not effectively assess vulnerability of newly arrived protection applicants, and subject all applicants experiencing homelessness to heightened risks. Members of state bodies such as An Garda Síochána have little knowledge of, or respect for, the legal rights and entitlements of people seeking protection.

#### **The actions of the state expose international protection applicants made homeless, and local volunteers, to violence and harassment by the far-right**

Through being forced to live rough on the street, people seeking protection become targets of harassment, abuse and violence by racist or far-right elements. Volunteers who try to support protection applicants, predominantly women volunteers, are subject to campaigns of harassment and threats of sexual violence by the far-right, both in person and online.

#### **The response of An Garda Síochána to racist and far-right violence towards international protection applicants and community volunteers was often confrontational and therefore increased the risk of violence. The Garda policy of moving people on at night also increased risk.**

Volunteers are struggling to fill the gaps in service provision left by the absence of the Irish state and are increasingly subject to far-right violence. The emergency response of the volunteers is not sustainable and is undermined by the violence of the far-right and the actions of the state itself. Without effective state intervention, the crisis of homelessness among people seeking protection will continue to create lasting and dire harm.



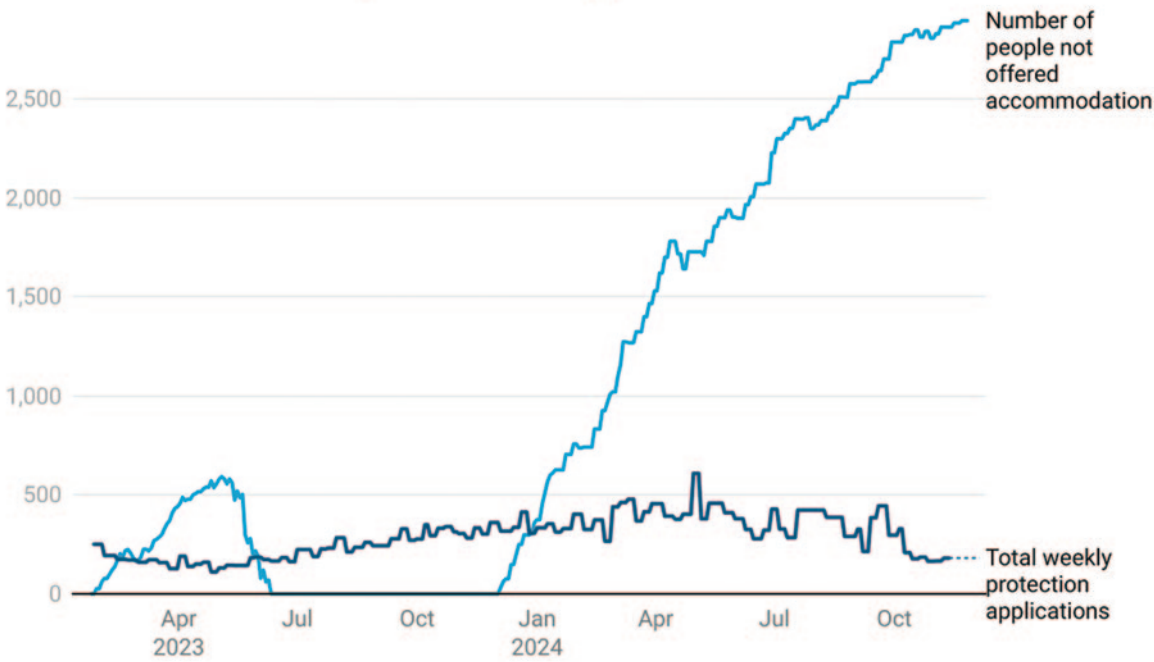
Dealing with coordinated harassment campaigns

While people seeking protection and volunteers report being subject to spontaneous, racially motivated and gendered harassment by passers-by, they have also been subject to more organised harassment campaigns. Throughout this report we document instances of coordinated campaigns to intimidate, harass and put in danger both people seeking protection and volunteers. These campaigns use a shared set of tactics including verbal abuse, physical violence, stalking and sharing of volunteer and international protection applicants' identities online. Harassment is coordinated by far-right groups both in public social media posts, and in private far-right social media groups. Harassment follows a reliable pattern of identifying groups of people seeking protection living rough in Dublin, sharing those details online with calls to violence, which then emboldens groups to arrive at camps, often at night, to instigate abuse or violence. When volunteers are present, they are subject to similar abuse and threats of violence.<sup>1</sup>

Statement from the Volunteers

We have supported more than a thousand people in deeply a vulnerable situation. We are members of the public, with professional and family commitments. We are not paid, and our work is voluntary. We have stepped in to fill a void that government agencies and other organisations should. This is not work we sought out, nor a report we intended to contribute to, but we felt compelled to do both by the failure of the state to act.

Unaccommodated protection applicants



Source: Irish Refugee Council • Created with Datawrapper

1 - For more on this subject see: Gallagher, A, Clout, kicks and clicks: Analysing the surge in anti-migrant harassment and violence in Ireland, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, September 2024.



Introduction

In December 2023, for the second winter in a row, the Irish government ceased providing accommodation on arrival to single male international protection applicants, supporting only those deemed “most vulnerable”<sup>2</sup>. Details on the state's legal obligations can be found in Annex 2. This policy change, which breaches the state's obligations under Irish, European Union and international law to meet the basic needs of protection applicants who do not have the means to support themselves, has so far affected nearly 6,400 newly arrived men (over 5,000 since December 2023; 1,400 in Spring 2023). Instead of receiving safe housing, each man was given a list of homeless services, often without sufficient guidance or translation to understand their situation. Some men managed to stay with relatives or in the community, while others pooled resources to rent rooms, beds, couches or floor space. However, many international protection applicants face exploitative and unsafe conditions on arrival to Ireland, and the most vulnerable have been left to fend for themselves while living rough on the street.

In response to unmet needs among these new arrivals to Ireland, independent community groups formed to provide basic aid and services. The Irish Refugee Council surveyed 49 volunteers from a network of over 150 people assisting these men. This research documents the state's failure to support people seeking protection and highlights the gap that local communities continue to fill, both on the streets and in state-run emergency tented accommodation centres. It also examines the violence that international applicants and volunteers face from racist and far-right groups. As a third winter approaches, with men seeking protection still being told there is no place for them in Ireland, this report illustrates the dangers of a failing and unsustainable system.

For the purpose of this report, we will use the term ‘person seeking protection who is living rough’ (see Annex 1).

This research builds on the Irish Refugee Council's June 2023 report, ‘Now I live on the road’<sup>3</sup> which describes the Irish Refugee Council's experience of supporting homeless people, and contains interviews with international protection applicants and testimonies from frontline service providers such as GPs and charity sector staff.

2 - IPAS, 2023, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ec5f2-statistics-on-international-protection-applicants-not-offered-accommodation/>  
3 - <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/now-i-live-on-the-road-new-report-on-homelessness-among-people-seeking-protection>





## Background

### Ad-Hoc Street Camps

When protection applicants were forced to live rough, they began to pitch tents together in Dublin, both for safety in numbers and to be visible to state services. While street camps were often cleared and broken down by private companies employed by state bodies, they were also visited by charities or the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) to determine if any protection applicants present were eligible for referral to emergency accommodation. In this way, joining a street camp became a pathway for protection applicants to be moved into more secure accommodation.

However, camps were also targets of harassment campaigns from far-right groups and sites of racist attacks on applicants. Volunteers provided support to men in street camps, while trying to get them access to more permanent accommodation. Volunteer groups then continued to support the men once in emergency accommodation, joined by local volunteers in the area.

### Local Community Volunteers

In response to the needs of people seeking asylum forced to live rough, community volunteers began to provide basic support. The groups, which have emerged since January 2023, are today made up largely of local residents committed to ensuring that homeless people seeking protection have access to food, shelter, basic services and opportunities to connect with the community. Operating on a mutual aid model, with people seeking protection or those currently or previously living rough often volunteering as part of these groups, volunteers contribute their time and resources to gather and distribute essentials or information. These self-organised, non-hierarchical groups are independent of any official body, though they may liaise with state or NGO services to guide people seeking protection to available support. Volunteers frequently bridge the gap between the men and services like health, social care or An Garda Síochána. A timeline of volunteer activities can be found in Annex 3.



## Methodology

To investigate the experiences of community volunteers conducting homeless outreach with people seeking protection, the IRC surveyed volunteers in October 2024. The survey (Annex 4) gathered demographic information, details of volunteer activities, personal investment of time and money, perspectives on challenges faced by people seeking protection, state support, and interactions among state bodies, volunteers and people seeking protection. Volunteers also reported on instances of harassment and Garda responses. Conducted online, the survey recruited participants from closed WhatsApp groups of community volunteers. Responses were anonymised, collated, and analysed through rapid qualitative analysis, revealing a high degree of consensus among respondents.





# Survey respondents

There were 49 respondents to the online survey. All had volunteered with people seeking protection on the streets of Dublin or in state-run emergency accommodation between January 2023 and October 2024.

## Volunteer Demographics

### Gender and Age

Of those who took part in the survey, two thirds were women (67.3%, Figure 1). Roughly a third of respondents were between the ages of 50-64, while another third were between the ages of 18-34 (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Gender of respondents

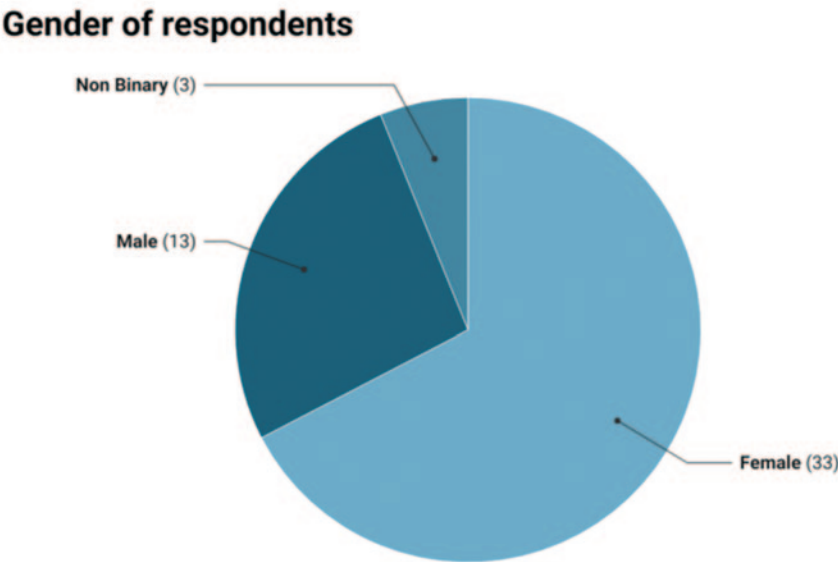
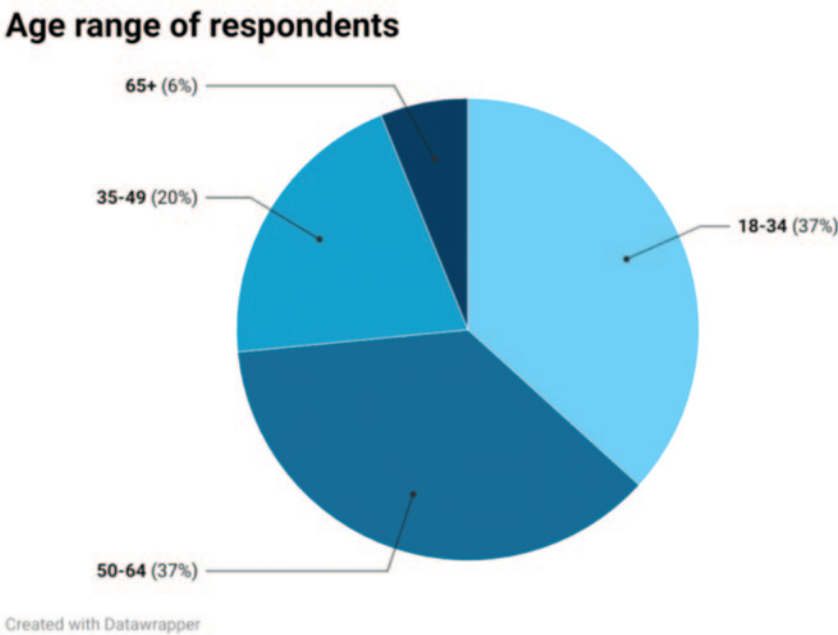


Figure 2: Age ranges of respondents



### Professions

Local volunteers came from diverse professional backgrounds, with most in employment across health and social services, education, the arts and technology. Many volunteers were students who were also engaged in part-time or full-time employment, while others were parents or primary carers for elderly or sick relatives. A small group was not currently in employment. The occupations of volunteers demonstrated the breadth of their responsibilities and experiences outside of their volunteer work.

## Volunteering Timeframes and Locations

Respondents had a variety of involvement in supporting people seeking protection. Some were consistently active over a long period, from January 2023 onwards, while others provided support during periods of high intensity (see Annex 1 Timeline). Volunteers supported people seeking protection living rough in multiple locations across Dublin, including the camp outside the International Protection Office (IPO) on Mount Street Lower, Sandwith Street, Shandon Gardens, Phibsborough, along the Grand Canal, and around Dublin 6 and Dublin 4. Some volunteers also supported men in state-run emergency accommodation in places such as Crooksling and Newtownmountkennedy.





## Survey responses

### Common and Urgent Needs

Volunteers were in consensus about the most common and most pressing needs of people seeking protection experiencing homelessness.

#### Basic shelter and food

Volunteers reported that people seeking protection had urgent needs for shelter and food. Respondents stated that those living rough required tents, clothing, bedding and tarpaulin for weather protection. Access to food was limited, especially outside of homeless day service operating hours, creating additional hardship for those of the Muslim faith during Ramadan. People living rough also lacked access to drinking water, hygiene facilities and sanitation, with no toilets or showers available, raising serious personal and public health concerns. One respondent referenced a portable toilet being installed at the IPO camp for a brief period which was then removed without explanation.



*"These men have less access to safe sanitation and clean water on the streets of Dublin than many refugee camps around the world."*

### Access to health, social and legal services

People seeking protection often required comprehensive health services, including medical, dental and mental health support, along with information on available resources, advocacy to gain access and accompaniment to services. Many men faced both chronic and acute health conditions, worsened by forced homelessness or placement in emergency tents on government sites.



*"By definition, refugees have typically gone through something horrific which means they have specific psychological needs while others might have a chronic or acute mental health concern unrelated to their reason for seeking asylum. In both cases, we have seen how difficult it is for these men to get the specific support needed. In fact, I cannot think of one success story in this regard. Instead, my mind goes to all the times I have had to talk to men about their suicidal thoughts or the time I had to sit and talk with a man for a few hours while he was under observation in a hospital after overdosing on his medication."*

People seeking protection also needed support in moving forward accommodation requests, and for legal services to address the progress of their International Protection applications.



*"Most of these men arrive and have no idea how the system works, so being able to talk to a friendly person with information is vital."*

### Community connection

People seeking protection were identified as needing social interaction and support. To combat the stress and insecurity of homelessness, they needed friendship and reassurance as well as to be treated respectfully by local communities. Volunteers mentioned the need for kindness and someone to listen.

### Opportunities for integration

Volunteers highlighted that people seeking protection wanted opportunities for integration with local communities, including to work and participate in local life. Many contrasted this with government emergency accommodation sites which were often on the periphery of the city, removed from communities. Integration services that were listed as required included volunteering and employment opportunities, transport and language support.

### Safety from violence and abuse

All volunteers mentioned the needs of the men on the streets and in emergency accommodation to be protected from racially motivated violence and abuse.



## Forms of Volunteer Support



*“Shelter, warm clothing, social connection and a sense of being seen and cared about.”*

### Provision of essential goods

According to survey responses, the most common form of volunteer support was the provision of essential goods. Volunteers provided food, water and warm drinks to people seeking protection living rough, regularly purchasing or preparing meals. Volunteers created cooking rotas, and recruited local restaurants, charities and religious organisations to contribute to the cause.



*“I paid for food (rice, lentils, vegetables, biscuits, tea, coffee) on several occasions for at least 20-30 [people]. On about 10 occasions, I spent at least 5-8 hours, preparing and serving food.”*

Volunteers also provided warm clothes by organising donation drives and distributions. Other purchased clothes for the men with their own money or let them wash clothes in the volunteers' own homes. Heavy clothing, rain gear and shoes were often a priority to protect the people seeking protection from poor weather conditions.



*“My first night out volunteering I went to my local shop and filled a suitcase with food and brought it out to distribute. There were many times I bought supplies and food out of my own pocket and also gave to group collections as well. I spent many nights away from my own family to help these people and many days too”*

While people seeking protection could receive tents and sleeping bags from homeless services, these were regularly destroyed by state services during camp clearances. To cover gaps, or to help outside of the working hours of homeless services, volunteers also provided tents and sleeping bags, which were either donated (after being cleaned by volunteers) by people seeking protection who were given accommodation or purchased and donated by the local community. Volunteers regularly retrieved tents and sleeping bags for cleaning and storage after camps were dismantled by state bodies. Volunteers also provided large sheets of tarpaulin which helped protect tents from the rain and provide shelter and privacy from agitators. Volunteers provided groundsheet, floor mats and blankets to try to alleviate the cold for the men on the street and provided warm bedding and clothes to men living in emergency accommodation.



*“The tents were not waterproof [so] tarpaulin had to be provided by the volunteers, and the sleeping bags were not warm enough during the colder weather.”*

Camps on the street regularly had no access to sanitation services, including toilets, water or washing facilities. Some volunteers allowed people seeking protection to use showers or toilets in their homes. Others distributed bin bags at the camps to help those camping collect waste, while others distributed hygiene products.

There was also no access to electricity at the camp sites. Since people seeking protection needed email access or phone access for updates on their International Protection application, the ability to charge phones was essential. Volunteers let people seeking protection charge devices in their homes or brought charging banks to camps.



*“My house is always open to asylum seekers.”*

### A dignity-centred approach

Volunteers described social support as one of the most impactful activities. Many noted the importance of being able to be a friendly face for the men. Having conversations with those living rough, welcoming them to the community or listening to their issues was integral to treating them with dignity and respect. Many commented on the dehumanising nature of the International Protection process, and how it had become the responsibility of the local community to show the applicants some humanity and compassion.

Volunteers described bringing a football to one of the camps, while others mentioned taking the time to have chats when providing tea and coffee or meals. Social support and presence at the camp was also necessary to counteract the racist abuse and violence which people seeking protection were subject to.

### Signposting state and charity services

A vital activity by volunteers, mentioned by almost all survey respondents, was directing people to state and charity services for support and access to entitlements. Volunteers highlighted that once people seeking protection were initially processed by the IPO and given an information sheet, they were left stranded with little to no support to find available services or entitlements. In person and via WhatsApp groups, volunteers regularly shared details on homeless support services, homeless day centres, medical clinics, social services, emergency accommodation referrals and language classes.



*“All of the [men] needed assistance with finding what local services offered what, i.e. tents, sleeping bags, where they could get medical treatment, legal advice, food”*

### Advocacy, casework and translation

Volunteers regularly provided ad-hoc advocacy and casework support. They aided people seeking protection in filling out government forms for access to services and entitlements. Volunteers sent emails on their behalf to state and homeless services. They also monitored and responded to queries on free legal aid in WhatsApp groups.





*"There were times when they needed us to speak with staff in the IPO directly in regard to medical needs and the importance of getting them into accommodation and had we not been there to advocate for them they would have been put on the long finger."*

Volunteers would share information on emergency accommodation referrals with homeless people seeking protection and direct men on the streets to Tiglin, a charity which was carrying out rough sleeper verification necessary for communicating with the state and making emergency accommodation referrals. Volunteers collected details of people seeking protection to compile a list of men who were particularly vulnerable and in need of urgent accommodation. There was a recurring feeling that if the volunteers did not monitor and advocate for the cases of vulnerable applicants, they would fall through cracks in the system.



*"It is almost impossible for them to get help without someone advocating on their behalf. It's as if these men are invisible to the Government while on the streets or in emergency accommodation, so they do not receive the support that others in proper state accommodation can more readily access."*

Volunteers also organised language supports for the people seeking protection. Volunteers, including homeless people seeking protection, who shared languages with other people seeking protection, including French, Arabic, Somali, Portuguese and Pashto, helped translate documents and government and charity announcements. Working with homeless people seeking protection who shared languages with other people seeking protection, including French, Arabic, Somali, Portuguese and Pashto, the volunteers also organised language supports for other people seeking protection helping translate.

Volunteers took responsibility of advocating to politicians and representatives of state bodies on the conditions that people seeking protection experiencing homelessness were subject to. Volunteers contacted the Department of Integration, the Department of Health, An Garda Síochána, Dublin City Council and other authorities, including local TDs and Senators. Volunteers also worked with journalists to highlight the deprivations and abuse people seeking protection were subject to.

#### Accompaniment and emergency support

Volunteers were often required to accompany people seeking protection to facilitate access and navigation of essential services. This included bringing people seeking protection to emergency health services for chronic and acute issues, to Garda stations to report crimes and abuse, and to hostels for emergency accommodation following attacks. Volunteers drove men to services, helped them fill out forms in English, and helped them speak to medical staff, Gardaí or social workers. When people seeking protection were identified as being children, volunteers referred them to Tusla for child protection services or accompanied them to the Garda station.

#### Protection and safety

Volunteers emphasised the need for the presence of local community members at the camps to try and protect the safety of people seeking protection. Volunteers coordinated, amongst themselves as well as with the people seeking protection, to locate safe locations

for those living rough to set up tents. Safety was characterised as both protection from violence and abuse, protection from risks of crime and theft, and protection from destruction of possessions by state bodies. Volunteer presence at the camps was also used to reassure those living rough and impart a sense of safety, as well as to dissuade opportunistic or organised violence and harassment. Far-right groups would frequently attack camps at night, and volunteers would try to be present for solidarity, and to contact the Gardaí. Volunteers responded to emergency calls for support from people seeking protection when camps were attacked, often putting themselves at risk of violence as well.

#### Volunteer investment

There was a wide variety of time and resource investment by individual volunteers. Some were active more than 20 hours per week in intense periods, while others were involved closer to 2 hours weekly.



*"In the beginning when I started there was little financial resources. I bought duvets and clothes for many. I visited the camp on average five nights a week."*



*"I work part time and am in full time education, I often spend my nights after college/work walking around the streets with other volunteers helping out where possible. This costs me money to travel in and out of the city. And I am very tired during the days in which I work. But I feel as if I don't do this then [it] will not be done"*

Some volunteers fundraised, organised donation drives or liaised with charity shops. Volunteers also invested their own money, which was used to purchase provisions such as food and bedding. Petrol was bought to transport people to community events or volunteering initiatives. Some volunteers paid for short-term accommodation for older or more vulnerable people, while others hosted people seeking protection in their own homes.



*"I bought food, flooring, bedding, clothing, power banks, tarps [and] fuel for collecting donations from my own personal money before a collective donations pot was created...At the height of it, I was spending 2-3 days a week down at the IPO, with usually one day a week collecting donations or sourcing supplies. I was in contact with other volunteers daily coordinating support and distribution"*

#### Government Supports For Homeless People Seeking Protection

In the survey, local volunteers were asked to describe any support they witnessed people seeking protection experiencing homelessness receiving from the Irish state. Some volunteers were not aware of protection applicants receiving any support, while others had some knowledge of the services provided or funded by the government.



*"I was aware that tents were provided at the Light House and that IPAS was directing applicants there, but I wasn't aware of much else."*





*"I was aware [that the state was providing some services] but [I was also aware of] the contradiction of giving people tents and sleeping bags while it [is] illegal to pitch them."*

Volunteers positively highlighted organisations like Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI) and the Irish Refugee Council and low threshold services run by charities, including Tiglin and the Light House, Mendicity, Safetynet, Crosscare, Merchants Quay and the Capuchin Day Centre which provided tents, sleeping bags and day services, or access to essential services such as health care. It was mentioned that these charities and services, while some receiving funding from the state, seemed not to coordinate appropriately with the IPO or the International Protection process. As mentioned previously, volunteers often had to signpost people seeking protection to these services and advocate for their access. It was also highlighted these services were not available at night.



*"All services provided by the state through existing charities and homeless services were barely able to keep up with demand, they were under tremendous amounts of pressure and massively under resourced. The services themselves were emergency homeless services mainly and were already underfunded so when the government chose to single out the men and put them on the streets...the homeless services had to take on that responsibility with little to no extra support"*

Some volunteers mentioned the weekly financial allowance for people seeking protection but recounted that it was not readily available for all applicants and that many needed help with their forms to apply for it. Similarly, supermarket vouchers—meant to help the men purchase extra warm clothing or food—were handed out sporadically. Accessing accommodation, such as hostels through a state reimbursement scheme, was also largely out of reach due to identification document barriers.



*"I know the state will also reimburse people...but you can only stay in a hostel in Dublin if you have some form of national ID from your home country which many people do not. We got a few hostels to agree to take people with photos of their old IDs...the men staying at hostels often have issues with receiving their reimbursements from the state...so they end up on the street as rough sleepers."*

Additionally, volunteers reflected that there was little to no direct support from the state. Volunteers noted the frustration felt when the state funded tents and sleeping bags only to later clear them away. As discussed in a later section, goods provided by state-funded charities were often destroyed by private companies, such as the Breffni Group, which were contracted by state bodies including Waterways Ireland, the Office of Public Works, and Dublin City Council—frequently in coordination with An Garda Síochána and IPAS. These actions often included the destruction of personal property and essential documents. Some volunteers reflected that the lack of effective supports provided by the state was a deliberate effort to create a hostile environment towards refugees and asylum seekers.



*"Maybe [state services] were helping a bit but it didn't seem like it and still doesn't. What I am seeing seems to be a deliberate effort by the state to do as little as possible for these men, make them suffer as much as possible so they will leave and word will get out to other people not to come to Ireland because it's so awful."*

Volunteers also described emergency tented accommodation offered to rough living people seeking protection. These were typified as unsafe, with low access to basic services and poor security. Those volunteering at these sites highlighted official local integration groups but little else in terms of additional support provided to residents.

## Safety



*"As a volunteer I am now scared of helping. I have been filmed on several occasions, verbally abused and threatened by extremist racists. But I am lucky, I still have the comfort of a home and my family. I cannot imagine what it must be like for people who have already lost so much to be exposed to such hatred. They are so scared, they never retaliate - the racists get no reaction so more and more they target volunteers, whom they ironically call NGOs...As winter approaches I am greatly concerned for what is going to happen, the racists seem to have free reign to do as they like, while the asylum seekers are being forced into hiding with nowhere to safely sleep, having to make new camps every night under cover of darkness."*

Volunteers were asked to describe the sense of safety at the makeshift camps of the homeless people seeking protection. All volunteers, across all locations, emphasised the lack of any safety at the camps. Camps were frequent targets of opportunistic abuse by passers-by and coordinated attacks by far-right and racist groups.



*"Camps are never safe, it isn't safe for anyone camping on the streets. There were nights I thought people were going to die during far right attacks. The fencing has made it seem that the IPAs are doing something illegal and made it very dangerous physically for homeless Irish and IPAs to camp."*



*"It is always edgy at camp. I have been present on many occasions when abuse was thrown at IPAs and volunteers by passers-by. 'Get out!' 'Get out of my country you f\*\*\*ing immigrant' 'the airport is that way' (to refugees) and 'you're the problem', 'watch your back' and 'scum' (addressed to volunteers). 'I'll be back with more lads'. 'I'll burn you out of your tents' 'my kids go to school around here' 'dirty animals!'"*

Volunteers recounted their own experiences witnessing abuse and violence directed at both people seeking protection and local community volunteers. Accounts ranged from racist and sexist abuse, intimidation and harassment campaigns, threats of physical and sexual violence, trashing and destruction of tents, and direct physical attacks on people seeking protection and local volunteers. Perpetrators were largely described as Irish men.





*"It was unsafe, the IPAs were exhausted and the volunteers were afraid. I've seen multiple men and women assaulted by older white men that come to harass the camp—volunteers have been stalked, punched, kicked and filmed constantly. I was punched in the face. People seeking protection have had the same treatment multiplied—they've been stabbed, hit in the head, etc."*

The location of camps was frequently shared by far-right groups and influencers on social media, which often prompted groups of men to arrive at the camps to enact violence. Volunteers were often filmed by far-right agitators, leading to campaigns of harassment of volunteers outside of their presence at the camps.



*"There have been multiple instances of violence/harassment towards people. A tent was set on fire, IPAs have been attacked. Volunteers have been harassed by far-right agitators and posted on social media"*



*"I was there when violent gangs showed up, several times over the course of a few days. They came with dogs, Hurley sticks lots of cameras and most of them were hiding their faces."*



*Also 'neighbours' (not from the area) / 'concerned citizens' showed up to harass and yell abuse at supporting residents of the Shandon area."*

Volunteers highlighted the gendered nature of the violence and abuse. The majority of volunteers are women, and female volunteers report being stalked by far-right men, and being threatened with sexual violence and rape. Female volunteers also received abusive comments as to why they would help "foreign men" and comments that they are unsafe around male people seeking protection.



*"Regular presence of far-right agitators recording and harassing IPAs and volunteers. Usually we attempted to ignore them, but they continued to verbally and, in some cases, physically intimidate us. One man...pretended to be a 'concerned local' when interacting with white volunteers, but hurled racist and sexually explicit verbal abuse at a volunteer of colour. The same man regularly dumped rubbish beside the camp which attracted rats."*



*"A lot of harassment from passersby... coming and threatening refugees and volunteers, in some cases assaulting us, threatening women with rape and murder"*

Volunteers reflected that while people seeking protection camped together for greater safety in numbers, the nature of the camps being in visible areas on public land made them

very vulnerable to violence and abuse. Similarly, when camps were destroyed by authorities, particularly at night, it made the men even more exposed to violence.



*"We couldn't be there at all times. We tried to do shifts and many did this throughout the night but there were many altercations, people coming and slashing tents and verbally abusing and threatening the [men]. As volunteers, we were also verbally attacked including [during] a protest organised by far-right at the IPO but we were able to call [on] a counter [group]"*

For volunteers, mitigating violence was a key concern. There was constant searching for safe sites for people seeking protection to camp. Volunteers tried to be present at camps to dissuade violence, which often led to violence being targeted towards them as well. Volunteers responded to attacks to attempt to de-escalate situations, to report incidents to the Gardaí, and to accompany people seeking protection to make reports to the Gardaí.



*"I have been called several times by IPAs who have been attacked in or around [the] camp. On one of these occasions, a person was hospitalised. From the outset, I have been aware of the lack of safety...and have sent many emails to the Gardaí and to ministers highlighting this fact. At the IPO, I bought whistles and distributed the...to be used to sound the alarm in case of attack. On at least one occasion these whistles proved useful: a tent was attacked one night at the IPO, the whistle was blown and all the other IPAs came out of their tents in support, causing the attackers to scarper. There was some safety in numbers at the IPO, but this disappeared when the camps became smaller."*

Volunteers, many of whom are the primary care givers in their families, mentioned the toll from being targeted by harassment and abuse but reflect that if they did not try to stand with the men, no one would.



*"Having to leave to go home to my family after attacks has been unbelievably heartbreaking and worrying, but no volunteer should have to take on the responsibility for keeping IPAs on the street safe. This is the job of the government."*



*"Of late we devised tactics to keep tents out of sight to avoid physical and verbal attacks and confrontation with public servants. We are forced into hiding because daily events were a strain on volunteers and [on] people who often went through difficult personal experiences"*





*"Almost every evening I was at the IPO there was an incident of harassment towards the IPAs, mainly from Irish men, this would range from tents being kicked to threats of violence towards the IPAs and the volunteers, one man threatened to slit one of the volunteer's throat. There was one...lad who would come down with his dog and harass the men every night, the Gardaí were aware and did nothing."*

Volunteers at emergency accommodation centres also remarked on how they felt unsafe, both for themselves and the residents, given the constant protests outside the centres.



*"Depends on the camp, depends on the day. Shandon happened at roughly the same time as the Coolock riot, so pretty quickly a large crowd gathered shouting the usual abuse ('traitors', 'get them out', 'rapists', etc) with several threatening to petrol bomb their tents. Similar threat-level as at protests against earlier camps (Sandwith street, Mount Street). After Shandon, the lads who had just arrived/hadn't been able to find anywhere else, ended up on the quays where they were viciously assaulted. Other camps I've been to after that, weren't as exposed, so the times I visited were more calm. Until they were cleared."*

### Inconsistency of Garda Response

Volunteers were asked to describe the response by the Gardaí towards the issue of safety at the camps. Some highlighted incidents where the Gardaí were effective and responded promptly to reports of violence. Others mentioned indifference of the Gardaí to abuse and violence towards people seeking protection and volunteers. Some highlighted instances of Gardaí escalating violent situations



*"There were times they were a great help, including the community Garda giving us his contact and being helpful. However, they didn't seem to care a lot"*

Volunteers reported the Garda response was extremely inconsistent, and varied by individual or by station.



*"As far as I have witnessed, Gardaí have been on alert and responsive when called in an emergency."*



*"Indifferent. Where there was a serious threat of violence, you may get some Garda presence temporarily, but the degree of harassment, intimidation and outright violence the [people seeking protection] are regularly subjected to (without consequence) indicates a staggering level of indifference on the part of the authorities. But how could you care about their safety and then throw away their shelter?"*



*"I have had several interactions with Gardaí. In some of these, individual Guards showed decency and a certain amount of compassion. On other occasions I was disappointed by the needlessly hostile approach."*

Two volunteers active in Phibsborough positively mentioned the Garda response there compared with other settings. Some volunteers also mentioned how the Gardaí would make emergency referrals of rough sleepers in the past but have since stopped.



*"The Sergeant from Mountjoy station was excellent, he spoke to refugee supporters and liaised with people seeking protection to get accommodation for the men and successfully closed the camp peacefully allowing the tents and tarpaulins to be removed and stored. He and his group protected the refugees from threat of violence."*

This was contrasted with the tactics of the Gardaí in regularly displacing the camps near the Grand Canal. The difference in response reveals a lack of coordination in the Garda response to homeless people seeking protection. The tactic of regularly dispersing the camps was criticised as increasing the vulnerability of people seeking protection, and lead to one situation where a volunteer was arrested while trying to stop a camp clearance.



*"The Gardaí have not had a positive effect on the safety at the camps. One reason is they have been moving the camps on a regular basis, and on some occasions, multiple times in one night. This puts the people seeking protection at risk and often they are forced to disperse. After one such occasion an IPA was forced to sleep all night under a bush."*

The volunteers regularly reported that Gardaí were more concerned with the visibility of the camps and complaints they had received rather than the safety of people seeking protection or volunteers.



*"It seems that their main response to the growing safety issues (harassment and attacks) is to try to move people on from places where more visible attacks could happen, rather than try to look into/follow up on the people doing the harassing or attacks. Apart from the arson attack on tents and sleeping bags I did not hear about them following up on any of the attacks or threats that happened in the period while I was volunteering"*

The majority of volunteers shared stories of Gardaí creating dangerous situations, failing to respond to violence by the far-right, and treating people seeking protection unprofessionally.





*"The Gardaí are typically the ones to bring a risk of unsafety... When they are not the ones making the camps unsafe (apart from a very brief period after the arson on Sandwith Street where the Gardaí kept a patrol) they do not respond to calls, do not send patrols when they say they will, never make emergency referrals (beyond once at Shandon Green), are slow or fail to investigate attacks on the camps or indoor spaces....."*



*"Gardaí were always heartless and aggressive in my experiences, they only cared about removing the people seeking protection from their area when they knew full well there was nowhere else to go. They were rarely responded to the violent far-right agitators with the same force and rudeness they have to IPAs."*



*"The Garda then said that I shouldn't be helping these men."*

Others highlighted the lack of knowledge or training of Gardaí on the specific needs or rights of international protection applicants under Irish law. Some volunteers reported that Gardaí had little or no knowledge of the 2015 International Protection Act.



*"[The Gardaí are] often unaware of the rights of people seeking protection and [have] little empathy to their situation. In one instance moving people seeking protection 3 times during the course of one evening and night. Inappropriate and unfounded comments such as 'oh he could speak English yesterday but he can't today'. Also marked differences between Garda stations as to awareness of emergency IPAS accommodation and how to access this. Also, volunteers being told to move IPAs and to come back at another time and photos would be taken of Temporary Residence Certificate (blue cards), but told on return this would not be done."*



*"Poor and irresponsible. They told me that they were unaware of any aspects of the International Protection Act. They regularly endangered IPAs by clearing their camps and failing to protect them from the far-right harassment which usually followed camp clearances."*



*"The main representative of the state that homeless asylum seekers engage with is the guards yet they are not trained to appropriately interact with them, they never ensure the men understand what they are saying despite the majority having little English comprehension and they seem to have little-to-no knowledge of the International Protection Act. Once when I mentioned the provision in the Act to the guards regarding people seeking protection's right to anonymity, I was told to stop talking about international law and that we have "Irish laws here in Ireland." Other times, I have been harassed by members of the far right in front of the guards and they have done nothing and tell me that they have a right to film in a public place, not*

*caring they will then use the footage to abuse me and cite hatred and violence against me online. To be honest, they often treat us and abusive members of the far right in the same manner, despite us being local community members trying to help people that the state has left to the wayside.*

Other volunteers reported dismissive or racist remarks by the Gardaí towards people seeking protection, often echoing abuse they received from far-right groups.



*"Gardaí often cleared the camps late at night. One Garda who attended the scene once said to us "why don't you bring them [people seeking protection] home with you if you're so concerned".*



*"The worst, however, are the guards who spew out the far-right narrative at you. Telling us that Ireland is full. Asking us if we would be scared walking by a group of foreign men (when clearly not, since we are there volunteering, and we are a group of majority women). Or telling us that if we care so much about their safety then we should take them in our own homes (which in fact many of us have done but it is not the solution to this problem). "*

Volunteers at emergency accommodation centres also held mixed feelings about the response of the local Gardaí. Some praised their supportive nature but noted that they could do more to protect them and the residents from the protestors.



*"I've had interactions with the Gardaí because of the abuse and intimidation from protestors. They have been very supportive. I've not met the local integration group but when River Lodge Trudder House opened they didn't visit as they deemed it unsafe because of protestors. I was in and out of the direct provision camp every day and I'm still alive."*

## Volunteer Interactions with Other State Bodies

Volunteers were asked if they had any interactions with other state bodies while supporting homeless people seeking protection.

### Waterways Ireland

Many volunteers who supported camps along the Grand and Royal canals interacted with Waterways Ireland, which monitored and destroyed camps in summer of 2024. At the same time Waterways Ireland erected fences along the Grand Canal to stop people from pitching tents. The majority of volunteer interactions with Waterways Ireland representatives and outsourced staff were negative. The breaking up of camps regularly led to the destruction of tents, and at times the private property and personal documents of people seeking



protection. Volunteers highlighted the emotional toll of continuous clearances and scrapping of materials.

“

*"I have been present at a lot of the clearances of the canal camps and have interacted with Waterways Ireland. They told us many times that they needed the tents to be moved because of the dangers of camping by the canal and the risks of someone falling into the water. However, the only deaths I am aware of at the canal this year took place after Waterways Ireland installed the fencing, leading to people camping in riskier locations along the canal bank."*

“

*"I encountered the Guards and Waterways staff during a clearance at Baggot St bridge. We had to work hard to save tents and materials which would have been wasted while being harried by the above"*

“

*"Waterways Ireland staff have recorded me as I am simply standing on the side of a road talking to IPAs. This behaviour I find to be very confusing as it is confrontational."*

“

*"This is a humanitarian emergency. These men are victims of crime in their own countries, in their journey here and tents, belongings are being stolen by Waterways Ireland and no one is ensuring those crimes are reported and followed up and they are not getting supports they are entitled to under Victims of Crime Act."*

### Dublin City Council and the Office of Public Works

In response to the camps, state bodies began to enact bylaws to dismantle them, in particular, Dublin City Council (DCC) and the Office of Public Works (OPW). Nominally under the guise of health and safety, these were operations where tents and sleeping bags, bought with government funding, were destroyed and homeless people seeking protection were dispossessed.

“

*"DCC (was) enforcing bylaws without putting the camp on notice or only supplying the notice after an eviction, carrying out evictions without making any emergency referrals or having services present and failing at providing indoor accommodation, destroying camps and failing to return or facilitate the collection of people's belongings leaving people without essential documents, clothing, bedding or any shelter!"*

“

*"We have huge email chains [with DCC] at IPO trying to get the most basic of sanitation in place."*

“

*"OPW staff - while they did give notice of the potential to enforce by-laws they didn't provide for the opportunity for the safe and orderly dismantling of the camp, time to co-ordinate and relocate to another location, refusal to allow for collection of tents, bedding and belongings they disposed of, preventing volunteers from dismantling the camp and instead disposing of all of the camp and people's belongings with Gardaí adding to this by threatening to arrest volunteers who tried to collect tents before disposal."*

### International Protection Accommodation Services

The International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) provide accommodation for people who have sought International Protection in Ireland. Volunteers regularly petition IPAS for accommodation for people seeking protection in general and in individual cases for those with particularly vulnerable needs. At the clearance of camps, IPAS would sometimes provide accommodation for people seeking protection while others reported a lack of support from IPAS staff at clearances. One respondent noted that IPAS staff "were dedicated and cooperative." However, other respondents described hostile exchanges with IPAS staff at camp clearances or staff refusing to speak to and ignoring volunteers.

“

*"Mostly, [IPAS] were not present at camp clearances and when they were, they were not supporting the people seeking protection but liaising with the contractors removing the tents...[They] refused to speak to me at one camp clearance when I advised that not all men had received accommodation offers and [I] asked where they should go and are they going to be given new tents as theirs was taken. [They] simply turned their backs to me."*

“

*"This incident was so upsetting in how the people and their property were treated that I could no longer volunteer on the streets. I felt it was so inhumane and wantonly destructive. The men were not permitted to carry much with them. They were moved to a much colder location and had to leave their bedding which was painstakingly collected and distributed by volunteers."*

“

*"At larger clearances, IPAS were typically present but would leave at some point so when people were left out from accommodation offers they were nowhere to be seen in order to ask what these men should do since their tents and sleeping bags (and sometimes personal belongings) had been scrapped by the Breffni staff, who I believe are contracted by Waterways Ireland to carry out the clearances. They also treated us with such contempt while we were helping and even passed some racist comments to us without any fear of doing so while at work and even on contract for a public body."*



## Why They Volunteer

Motivations for volunteering stemmed from a concern over the lack of state services, a need to provide help and a deep sense of community solidarity. Many volunteers expressed frustration over the perceived failure of state mechanisms to adequately support people seeking protection.

“

*"I am ashamed of our governments approach to dealing with these men many of whom are fleeing wars and violence and are extremely traumatised. The ones that have been given 'accommodation' are stuck in tents on the side of a freezing mountain with no electricity and just a sleeping bag for warmth."*

“

*"I was appalled by the conditions these people were left in, to literally fend for themselves with little to no support in awful weather conditions (snow, cold and rain). As a wealthy country this is unacceptable."*

Other volunteers highlighted the necessity for community action, without which many protection applicants would be left behind.

“

*"If it weren't for the advice and help provided by the other volunteers (and people seeking protection in the system as well), I have no idea what we'd have done to help the lads we took in. We couldn't find/get through to any services that could tell us what we should have been doing to help them get their accommodation offers. In the end, due to an error made when their information was being collected at their first meeting, they didn't end up receiving an email offer. Instead, one of the volunteers called someone they knew at the centre and asked them to check the list for their names. If they hadn't, the lads would've lost their place at the centre without even knowing it. Everyone in this system has just been completely abandoned by the state."*

Some volunteers described how volunteering replaced the helplessness they felt when seeing the men living on the streets, noting that the experience has been both rewarding and transformative, offering the opportunity to connect with “brave and kind” newcomers and committed co-volunteers.

“

*"Being a volunteer has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have taken part in and it replaced the helplessness I felt when I would see the IPA's all over the media living in the streets. I'm so thankful to have the opportunity to get to meet so many brave & kind people who have left their country and come to Ireland to make a life as well as truly incredible co-volunteers that give everything to [these men]."*

“

*"I was overwhelmed by so many things during my limited efforts with this group. The dedication of volunteers, many who are women and all who have families, careers and other responsibilities. The government has sat back and allowed a potentially catastrophic situation to develop knowing these volunteers prevent it from being so...I have made several friends and enjoyed social interactions with many People seeking protection and they need to be treated with dignity instead of a campaign of othering and fear mongering. These men are highly vulnerable and we owe them at a minimum physical safety. With the right supports they will go on to contribute and integrate here which will be a positive for Ireland"*

Another volunteer reflected on the powerful connections formed with newcomers and community members alike, expressing hope for future initiatives that could foster positive contributions beyond crisis response. Others shared pride in their community's response, contrasting it with the "uncoordinated effort" by the state and the troubling conditions people seeking asylum endure, including racial abuse and inadequate emergency accommodation.

“

*"I am in awe of the people I have met this year while volunteering. The newcomers to our country and my neighbours who I might not have otherwise known. I am looking forward to a time when we can come together on something more positive that better contributes to our communities, rather than trying to provide emergency support to those in the depths of despair."*





## Discussion

### Gaps in Service Provision

This report highlights the failure of the Irish state to fulfil its legal and moral obligations in providing basic support to people seeking protection. The testimonies from volunteers paint the picture of a system plagued by self-defeating policies, mismanagement of vulnerable people and lack of coordination across state bodies.

The state's failure to provide basic provision of services to protection applicants without a suitable replacement system is deeply irresponsible. New arrivals are given the minimum of information and forced into living rough on the street. There is a lack of access to regular and emergency accommodation for protection applicants, and while homeless services cover some needs of applicants living rough, these services are usually day only, leaving men vulnerable and isolated out of hours. This is compounded by statements from government officials, placing the blame on international applicants for increased demand on homeless services, when this is a direct result of government policy.

State services are poorly coordinated on the treatment and support of protection applicants. New arrivals are inconsistently screened for vulnerability and receive virtually no management of their cases. There is a lack of official processes for, or knowledge of, prioritisation. There is no process for night arrivals or family arrivals on bank holidays. The Gardaí, who become the de facto point of contact for those seeking protection, respond to

applicants living rough with inconsistent procedures, often ignorant of legal protections and entitlements for applicants.

The provision of tents and sleeping bags to people seeking protection by state funded charities, on the direction of the state, only to be later destroyed by the Gardaí and Waterways Ireland is an act of extreme wastefulness. Providing tents to men seeking protection, only to make the use of those tents illegal and a point of political debate is an act of cruelty and cynicism.

Even emergency accommodation, which volunteers constantly fight for access to, is plagued by similar lack of basic services to those living on the street. Emergency accommodation is often lacking in heating, hygiene and sanitation services, and not fit to meet basic needs. Emergency accommodation for single men is seen by many to be worse than living on the street, prompting some applicants to return to living rough.

### The Role of Volunteers

Volunteers, working alongside charities, are the only thing preventing the crisis of homeless international protection applicants from escalating. The state's responsibility to provide services, while putting people seeking protection in increasingly unsafe situations, can only be ignored due to the hard work of community volunteers in providing basic supports. Volunteers reflected on the deliberate cruelty of the state treatment of applicants, and how volunteer intervention struggled to stem the tide of problems that were growing. Volunteer support was based on the recognition of the rights and dignity of all applicants to be treated with human decency, in the face of an inhumane system.

### Weaponising "Safety"

From this report and others, we see that the cruelty and abuse committed against people seeking protection is often carried out under the concerns of public safety.

The far-right campaign against people seeking protection in Ireland consistently recycles racist narratives and talking points. Asylum seekers are framed as "military aged men", and cast as a threat, and in particular a sexual threat, to white Irish women. The far-right response, abuse and violence towards the most vulnerable in Irish society, is in contrast framed as an act of protecting women and local communities.

The volunteer experiences highlight the irony of this ideology. The majority of female volunteers, from local communities, have been subject to harassment, stalking, abuse and violence from far-right agitators. The far-right have threatened women with sexual violence simply for trying to help people seeking protection. Volunteers report their safety being jeopardised only by far-right Irish men.

We see the response of state services echoing this weaponisation of "safety" as a means to harass people seeking protection living rough. Street camps, where protection applicants have some nominal safety and support, are routinely cleared by Gardaí and Waterways Ireland. This often happens at night, leading to heightened risk for the men displaced.



The volunteers report on the constant failure of Gardaí to provide meaningful safety from far-right violence, in some cases escalating situations or refusing to help. From testimony we see individual Gardaí parroting far-right talking points about the men seeking protection being a threat to Irish women, a sign of how insidious these falsehoods are across society.



## Recommendations

We urge the government to meet its legal obligations by providing adequate accommodation for people seeking protection. These recommendations, based on volunteer surveys and the Irish Refugee Council's work with homeless applicants, align with recent Civil Society Recommendations for International Protection<sup>4</sup>. While responsibility ultimately rests with An Taoiseach and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, a whole-of-government approach is essential to safeguard vulnerable people in Ireland.

### Department of An Taoiseach

1. **End Street Homelessness** for International Protection applicants, fully complying with Ireland's legal obligations. Prioritise immediate accommodation for all applicants at the point of arrival, resourcing and reinstating vulnerability assessments to identify urgent needs.
2. **Lead a Whole-of-Government Approach** to address accommodation and support needs for protection applicants and those with refugee status or permission to remain currently supported by community volunteers requiring Dublin City Council and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive to respond appropriately. .
3. **Immediately Implement a Cold Weather Emergency Plan** to protect residents in emergency accommodation and rough sleepers over the coming months, which includes moving those in emergency tents indoors. Use empty State buildings and emergency beds in IPAS centres and open a drop-in centre in coordination with local government agencies like the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive so that no person must sleep outdoors in dangerously low temperatures.
4. **Commit to and Champion the Ending of Direct Provision.** The current situation cannot be used as an excuse to prolong a dysfunctional and degrading system.
5. **Improve Oversight of Centres** while they remain open by extending HIQA's mandate to monitor all IPAS accommodation centres, including the 250+ emergency and temporary centres, ensuring compliance with National Standards.

<sup>4</sup> - Civil Society Manifesto Recommendations on International Protection, October 2024, available at: <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=91a6f836-a5ee-4878-8590-0394cb4682d3>



Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

1. **Establish 24-Hour Emergency Drop-in Centres.** Fund at least one centre to provide immediate access to food, warmth, document storage, safety and emergency referrals for International Protection applicants.
2. **Enhance Outreach Efforts.** Transition to an outreach model that eliminates the requirement for individuals to sleep rough before being referred to emergency accommodation. Prioritise same-day offers of emergency accommodation and adopt a rights-based, person-centred approach. This approach should focus on proactively identifying locations where men are living rough, assessing their individual needs, and providing tailored support, including signposting them to essential services and advocating for their access to necessary resources.
3. **Improve Emergency Accommodation Conditions.** Replace tents with permanent structures or modular buildings where possible and ensure emergency sites provide necessary services, including hygiene, warmth, and cooking facilities. Conduct unannounced inspections of IPAS centres, ensuring basic necessities (toiletries, laundry, etc.) are provided and that staff are appropriately trained and supervised.
4. **IPAS Processes and Systems.** Modernise occupancy tracking systems at IPAS centres to ensure accurate, real-time records of bed availability.
5. **Improve Communication and Complaint Mechanisms.** Move away from solely communicating via email, particularly when email addresses are often incorrectly recorded, and allow communication via other channels. Ensure an appropriate channel for complaints, particularly those regarding conditions in emergency accommodation, that is separate from the general enquiry email inbox, which is overwhelmed with messages daily, unable to reply to all.
6. **Strengthen Collaboration with Community Volunteer Groups.** Establish structured partnerships with community volunteer groups supporting international protection applicants. This collaboration should include regular communication, resource sharing, and coordinated efforts to address urgent needs, ensuring a cohesive approach to supporting applicants and enhancing community-led initiatives.
7. **Increase the Daily Expenses Allowance to homeless protection applicants.** In August 2024 the High Court found the payment to be insufficient.
8. **Employment Opportunities.** Adjust regulations to allow protection applicants to apply for work permits earlier, ideally within 2-3 months of arrival, to facilitate self-sufficiency.

Department of Social Protection

1. **Adjust Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA).** Ensure SWA provides adequate support for individuals to access hostels or private accommodation when available and partner with hostels to revise booking policies by allowing International Protection applicants use their IPO registration card as a form of ID.
2. **Enhance Communication Channels.** Improve information accessibility for homeless

protection applicants, providing alternatives to the overloaded IPAS email system.

An Garda Síochána

1. **Training on Protection Applicants' Rights.** Ensure Gardaí are knowledgeable about the rights of protection applicants under Irish and international law, improving the consistency of their engagement with this vulnerable group and protection of their rights.
2. **Training to Combat Misinformation.** Provide Gardaí with specialised training to identify and counteract far-right narratives and misinformation related to international protection applicants. This training should include strategies for recognising extremist influence, ensuring Garda interactions remain unbiased, and supporting community cohesion and safety.
3. **Improve Cooperation with IPAS.** Streamline the emergency referral process by clarifying the Gardaí's role in providing accurate information and making timely referrals for individuals living rough. Ensure this role aligns with government policies and is widely understood and consistently applied by Gardaí at all levels, including those working directly on the streets.
4. **Support Victims' Rights.** Ensure international protection applicants who have been victims of crime receive appropriate support, including access to victim assistance services, trauma-informed care and culturally sensitive guidance. Establish a clear protocol for Gardaí to respond to protection applicants who are victims of crime effectively and compassionately.

Department of Justice

1. **Suspend Interviews and Decisions for Homeless Applicants.** Ensure that International Protection applicants who are homeless have the option of pausing their application until they have stable accommodation. This measure would help guarantee fair and informed participation in the protection process, recognising the challenges faced by individuals without secure housing.
2. **Adapt Processes to Reality.** Modify international application procedures to accommodate people experiencing homelessness by changing the requirement to receive documents at a registered address. Instead, enable documents to be collected at designated government offices. Additionally, remove the need for applicants to print and send physical documents to the IPO, streamlining the process for greater accessibility. Additionally, allow applicants from "Safe Countries" to access work permits regardless of the initial decision on their case, provided they are in the appeals process.

Department of Transport

1. **Enhanced Transport Support.** Provide financial or logistical support for transportation to and from IPAS centres, ensuring fair treatment for individuals who rely on public transport but are housed away from urban centres, social and health services, and community integration opportunities.





## Annex 1

### Key Terminology

**A person seeking protection:** Throughout this report, we use the term 'person/people seeking protection,' which means anyone who has applied for international protection but has not received a final decision. A person seeking protection may also be referred to as an International Protection Applicant (or 'IPA'), or as an 'asylum seeker.' Unless otherwise stated, this report refers exclusively to people seeking protection who arrived in Ireland on or after 24 January 2023, and who did not immediately receive accommodation from the state.

**Homelessness:** In Ireland, people seeking protection who are not offered state accommodation are classified as 'living rough' and may later be placed in state-provided tented shelters for asylum seekers, separate from County Council shelters for the homeless, which are inaccessible to them. We use the ETHOS Light definition of homelessness, developed by FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless), which defines the two most serious and extreme versions of homelessness as:

1. 'Living rough': people living in public spaces or external spaces. This includes people living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters. This includes people living in cars, tents and living rough.
2. People in emergency accommodation or night shelters: people with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelters or low threshold shelters.

## Annex 2

### Legal Obligation to support asylum seekers

International Protection applicants are entitled to support from the state if they do not have the means to provide for themselves. This includes accommodation and food. It also includes access to basic healthcare and a small stipend, known as the Daily Expenses Allowance (or 'DEA'), of €38.80 a week. These supports are referred to as 'material reception conditions.' Material reception conditions are provided for in law under the Reception Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU), transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018.

Since January 2023, the Irish government has ceased providing accommodation to single male international protection applicants, in contravention of its legal obligations under EU law. As a direct result, many international protection applicants become effectively homeless, living rough in tents on the street. Single male international protection applicants may be offered emergency accommodation if deemed among the "most vulnerable" by the state. However, vulnerability assessments are carried out inconsistently by state services, leaving men with critical needs living on the street.

The government agency responsible for ensuring international protection applicants have access to material reception conditions is the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) within the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).





## Annex 3: A volunteer's diary

### January-June 2023:

- The Irish government ceased providing accommodation to single male asylum seekers, leading many to pitch tents around the International Protection Office on Mount Street, Dublin 2, where they registered.
- Waiting times for accommodation often stretched to 2-3 months.
- Homeless charities were instructed not to distribute tents or sleeping bags to asylum seekers, leaving volunteers to source these supplies independently.
- Initially, the men did not have access to the weekly payment (Daily Expenses Allowance). This was later amended, and the men were provided with €38.80 a week.
- Some people were housed by activists in vacant buildings, while a second camp was set up on Sandwith Street but was later burnt down by a racist mob.
- In June, as student accommodation became available, all were housed, and men began receiving accommodation upon arrival once more.

### December 2023 - February 2024:

- In December 2023, the government announced again they would not be offering accommodation to single males seeking protection. This time tents and sleeping bags were funded and subsequently provided through homeless charities.
- In response, a camp began to form around the IPO offices.
- The IPO stopped carrying out vulnerability assessments on entry to new arrivals, leading to vulnerable men being forced to camp on the street.

- There were nights of snow where some were temporarily housed but sent back to the streets afterwards. Safetynet and homeless charities were involved in these temporary clearances with people seeking protection.

### March 2024:

- The camp around the IPO was dismantled in advance of St Patrick's Day and the men were bussed to St Brigid's, emergency tented accommodation on the grounds of a vacant HSE nursing home in Crooksling at the base of the Dublin mountains.
- That same night many were back to the streets, alongside new arrivals, citing lack of access to basic services and distance from other essential services as key reasoning for leaving Crooksling.
- Men continued not to be offered accommodation on arrival.

### April 2024:

- The camp continued to grow at the IPO while sanitation risks also grew and virtually no organised support aided the men onsite.
- Few of those living rough were receiving accommodation offers.
- Homeless and refugee charities could refer people living rough for accommodation but that did not typically mean the person would be offered accommodation.
- Towards the end of the month, the government announced that it would offer temporary accommodation to people seeking protection who were living rough, however, many were not included.
- Volunteers advocated to get additional people included in this temporary offer.

### May 2024:

- There was a major clearance of the IPO camp carried out by state bodies, which would not allow volunteers near the clearance and began locking down the street in the early hours of the morning.
- Some volunteers did manage to make it through the barriers and tried their best to help and keep the men calm, as they were worried they were all being deported, given the narrative in the media at the time.
- More than 250 men were taken to either emergency tented accommodation in places like Crooksling or Newtownmountkennedy or to the City West Transit Hub.
- Some who had missed the buses or were sleeping elsewhere the night before made their own way to accommodation centres only to be turned away and others were also turned away who had been brought there by bus with a lack of bed spaces cited as why.
- Fences were erected around the IPO and all areas where a tent had been or could be pitched in the surrounding area. However, since the government was not offering accommodation on arrival to single men and many were still without accommodation, this left many men in need of a place to camp that night.

### May - June 2024:

- Following the clearance of the IPO, men began to camp at the canal in order to have somewhere to stay while they waited for services.
- After a few weeks, the camp was cleared and men were bussed out to accommodation. Tents, sleeping bags and possessions were destroyed by the state.
- Two more camps were set up at the canal, and each was cleared.



- Camps were progressively more disorganised, volunteers tried to advocate for those left behind by drawing up lists and sending to people seeking protection, homeless services, IRC to advocate for them.
- The night before the last clearances, staff of The Light House and Simon Community appeared photographing Temporary Residence Certificates (blue cards). This was the first time this happened, and no clear explanation was given - just that they were documenting rough sleepers.
- Gardaí began using emergency referrals to send applicants living rough to emergency accommodation in Citywest.
- While Gardaí always had this power, they chose not to use it.
- To prompt Gardaí response, volunteers set up a series of public camps.
- Men were able to have their referral for accommodation processed within a day.
- 6th June Leeson Street bridge camp - significant as the Gardaí refused to do emergency referrals.

### Phibsborough

- At this point the Gardaí had stopped doing emergency referrals. Gardaí at Pearse street came out to inform volunteers of this.
- Camp set up in Phibsborough.
- The following night international protection applicants camped on the quays, were attacked and fled to Pearse Street station.

### July and August 2024:

Camps on southside, dodder and Beggars' Bush

- This emerged as the only way to have priority accommodation referrals
- Safetynet started to say publicly that they had nothing to do with accommodation referrals - and only referred the extremely medically vulnerable.
- Men travelled to Dublin from other cities to get referrals as no referrals through homeless services outside of Dublin.

### September 2024

- Referrals now happening 7 days a week.
- Beginning of international protection applicants just showing up for Temporary Residence Certificate photographs.
- Gardaí never doing emergency referrals but clearing camps on canal daily.
- Waterways Ireland employ security along canal.







# Annex 4: Survey form

## Volunteer Report Research Questions

The Irish Refugee Council is preparing a report to highlight the ongoing work done by volunteers to support asylum seekers who have been made homeless by the state. To support this, we are asking for local community volunteers to share their experiences supporting asylum seekers or International Protection Applicants (IPAs) who have been subject to homelessness, between January 2023 to October 2024.

Below is a brief survey for volunteers. We would appreciate if you could share your own experiences and the experiences of the IPAs you supported. All responses are anonymous, and no identifying information will be shared with other parties. The safety of IPAs and volunteers is a priority to us.

We would appreciate if you could take the time to answer the questions across. Please be as detailed as you can. If there are any questions you would prefer not to answer please write N/A.

Thank you very much for your valuable input and time!

1. Please select you gender:

☐ Woman

☐ Man

☐ Non Binary

☐ Prefer not to say

2. Are you trans / do you have a trans history?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

3. What is your age?

☐ Under 18

☐ 18-34

☐ 35-49

☐ 50-64

☐ 65+

☐ Prefer not to say

4. Do you work or study or care for a family member outside of being a volunteer? If yes please briefly describe your profession or area of study or care role?

5. During what timeframe did you take part in volunteering?

e.g. March to May 2024

6. Where did you provide support? Feel free to metion multiple locations

e.g. International Protection Office, Mespil Rd etc.

**7. What activities did you help with as a volunteer?**

e.g. providing food, coordinating support, distributing tents, signposting services, medical, bedding, clothes, information sharing, accompaniment, advocacy, hygiene, legal, social systems support.

**8. During your time volunteering, what support did IPAs staying on the street or in camps most commonly need?**

**9. Which supports provided by the volunteers stood out to you as having the greatest impact?**

**10. Could you describe any financial, material or time investments you have made as a volunteer?**

**11. When you were volunteering, were you aware of any supports being offered to IPAs by the state? Were there any state supports that were particularly effective?**

**12. During your time volunteering with the IPAs, did you have any interactions with members of state bodies? What was your experience?**

**13. How would you describe the sense of safety at the camps? Were you present during any incidents of violence or harassment towards volunteers and/or IPAs? If so, please describe.**

**14. How would you describe the Gardai response to issues of safety at the camps?**

**15. In your opinion what were the top 3 most urgent needs amongst the IPA's experiencing homelessness?**

**16. Is there anything else you would like to share?**









**Registered office**

37 Killarney Street  
Dublin 1  
D01 NX74

**Phone:** 00 353 1 764 5062

**Fax:** 00 353 1 672 5927

**Email:** [info@irishrefugeecouncil.ie](mailto:info@irishrefugeecouncil.ie)

**CHY Number:** 10153

**Registered Charity Number:** 20025724

**CRO number:** 188693