

Refugee Contribution to Europe

A feasibility study on the establishment of a
Fund for Refugee Employment and Education (FREE)
in the European Union

Ireland

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The feasibility study was carried out during the period May to July 2002. Contact was made with potential partners and donors initially through telephone calls and letters of introduction requesting a meeting, and in the final instance in face-to-face meetings. The highest level of responsiveness and interest in the study came from those groups working most closely with refugees on the ground. It was particularly difficult to engage the interest of private companies and no meetings between the researcher and representatives of private companies were scheduled. It was noted by Brian Harvey¹ that Ireland has a very low level of corporate giving by international standards and when companies do give it tends to be comparatively small sums to local initiatives. This observation was supported by the researcher's experience in communicating with a number of private companies.

The meetings with interested partners were guided by the principles laid out in the guidelines provided by the steering group. The meetings took the form of loosely structured conversations that examined the different areas of interest to FREE and to the partner and culminated in filling out a questionnaire to establish the level of potential interest and/or commitment of the possible partner to FREE. In no circumstances were any of the agencies interviewed willing to consider financial donations to FREE at this stage. The main reason given for this was lack of information. In the case of NGOs and some of the statutory agencies it was made clear that they would hope to be financial beneficiaries of FREE rather than contributors.

Statutory agencies, such as the Area Based Partnerships, accepted that there was a need for a more structured approach to identifying and responding to the specific needs of refugees particularly in relation to accessing employment and training opportunities. The Partnerships were established after a government taskforce was set up to look at unemployment and disadvantage in areas that were considered especially vulnerable. The principle behind the Partnerships is that they should work in partnership with local services and agencies focusing on education, community development and business initiatives within specified geographical areas. Local Employment Services (LES) were brought in as service providers within the Partnerships. The Partnerships identify specific target groups within their area for their services. All the Partnerships contacted identified refugees and asylum seekers as one of their stipulated target groups. The range of services provided by the Partnerships differed but in general they are equipped to offer guidance and mentoring services, working closely with clients to establish the individual's needs and to support them in achieving their aims through the Partnership's services, directing them to other agencies where appropriate. For the purposes of FREE in Ireland the Partnerships could represent a very effective structure for the delivery of some of the activities of FREE. They have a well-established infrastructure with funding support from ADM (Area Development Management), among other agencies; they are focused on, and have expertise in, the areas of disadvantage and social exclusion.

NGOs and voluntary agencies working with refugees and asylum seekers on the ground greeted the aspirations of FREE with most enthusiasm. These groups tended to have the greatest understanding of the real barriers facing refugees on a daily basis. In most instances these agencies opposed the government policy of "direct provision" and objected to the fact that asylum seekers were not entitled to work or to access publicly funded training and education programmes. The general feeling among NGOs and voluntary agencies was that, while a fund such as FREE would be welcomed in an Irish context, in some sense it might be somewhat premature in the current environment; as one participant observed, it could be a case of "putting the cart before the horse". It was widely felt that refugees and asylum seekers have more immediate short-term needs in Ireland, in particular in relation to English language training, before they can effectively access further training. There was a strong feeling that, in the absence of adequate English

¹ Brian Harvey is the author of *Rights and Justice Work in Ireland: A New Base Line* (2002), The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

language training (supported by the appropriate statutory agencies and funding), refugees and asylum seekers would be ill equipped to progress to training, educational and job opportunities. As one participant observed, there is no point in having access and support to follow a third-level college course if the candidate does not possess the necessary level of English language proficiency.

Most participants felt that the structures do exist within Ireland for appropriate English language training provision, vocational training, educational programmes, and back-to-work schemes but that some of the agencies involved lack the political will and commitment to address the particular needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Indeed, Fás (the national training and employment authority), VECs (Vocational Education Committees), the Partnerships and other service providers do have in place very effective mechanisms for alleviating the barriers that refugees face in accessing services, but it is necessary that refugees should be appropriately and formally included in the remit of these service providers. This is necessary to ensure that the services can address the real, as opposed to the perceived, needs of refugees and asylum seekers. It is on this issue that NGOs and voluntary agencies feel that they can make a significant contribution to the development of statutory services, by providing the information and expertise that they have attained through working with refugees on a daily basis on the ground. Many of these agencies have produced detailed reports and studies on the real needs of asylum seekers within their regions (refer to bibliography). In particular it is necessary that refugees and asylum seekers are consulted in the development of policies, structures and mechanisms to ensure equal and fair access to educational and employment-related training and opportunities.

SECTION 2: KEY PLAYERS

The following is a list of some of the key players working with asylum seekers and refugees and those agencies of relevance to FREE.²

Statutory agencies

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – The UNHCR Liaison Office was established in Ireland in 1998.

Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform – the government department responsible for the implementation of the Government's asylum strategy and further development of national immigration policy. The mission of the department is: “To maintain and enhance community security and equality through the development of a range of policies and high quality services which underpin: the protection and assertion of human rights and fundamental freedoms consistent with the common good; the security of the State; an effective and balanced approach to tackling crime; and progress towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities and the accommodation of diversity.”

Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment – the department’s role is to implement policy in the areas of enterprise, employment promotion, trade development, protection of workers and the regulation of businesses. Its mission is: “To promote the sustainable development of a modern competitive enterprise economy based on quality employment, social inclusion and enhanced working and living standards.”

Department of Education and Science – the government department responsible for the provision of educational services. Its mission statement reads: “to provide high-quality education, which will: enable

² For details of all refugee services in Ireland refer to Begley, M. and Baxter, R. eds. (2002), *REFWORLD Ireland Directory 2002*, Dublin: SPIRASI

individuals to achieve their full potential and to participate fully as members of society, and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development.”

Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs – The Irish Social Welfare System provides supports and services to people at various stages of their lives. The Department's mission is: "to promote social well-being through income and other supports which enable people to participate in society in a positive way."

Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (RAC) – a statutory independent office which investigates applications from people seeking a declaration of refugee status and which issues recommendations to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) – a statutory independent office which considers and decides appeals from asylum seekers against the Refugee Applications Commissioner should the applicant not be declared to be a refugee.

Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) – a non-statutory agency under the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. RIA is responsible for coordinating the provision of services to refugees and asylum seekers and the implementation of integration policy for refugees and individuals with humanitarian leave to remain. The agency has 7 reception centres and 78 accommodation centres for housing asylum seekers.

Refugee Legal Service (RLS) – an independent body which provides legal assistance to people applying for a declaration as a refugee, under the auspices of the Legal Aid Board.

Vocational Education Committees (VEC) – There are 33 VECs throughout Ireland. Their main task is the provision of second-level education, further education and lifelong learning and they are financed by the Department of Education and Science. VECs may provide literacy, English language and mother culture support to asylum seekers who do not have an entitlement to work or to access educational services at publicly funded educational institutes. However, these services must be resourced from current budgets. Educational provision differs from VEC to VEC; however, the majority offer basic language and literacy education, basic numeracy education, general second-level education and further education programmes, including Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs) and VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme). Refugees are entitled to access all services provided by the VECs.³

FAS (Foras Aiseanna Saothair – Training & Employment Authority) – national training and employment authority. Fás provides a range of training and employment programmes, aimed at employers, employees and unemployed people. It is the primary provider of such services in Ireland. Total Fás expenditure for the year 2000 was €738,271,000. In 2000 Fás provided training to 39,937 people and employment programmes to 55,230 people.⁴ In March 2002 the Fás Asylum Seekers Unit was closed down. Up to 12th August 2002 1,437 people had registered with Fás or LES who were refugees, people with humanitarian leave to remain or those asylum seekers who were granted permission to work under the July 1999 initiative.⁵

Area Development Management (ADM) – the funding body for local development. ADM is an intermediary company set up by the government and the EU. It is funded under the National Development

³ IVEA (2001), *IVEA Policy on Educational Provision for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Non-nationals*, Dublin: Irish Vocational Educational Association. Pp 4, 11.

⁴ FAS Annual Report & Financial Statements 2000.

⁵ Figures provided by Mary Beggan, Manager, Social Inclusion & Equality, FAS, Dublin.

Plan (NDP). ADM supports integrated local economic and social development by managing programmes targeted at countering disadvantage and exclusion, and promoting reconciliation and equality. It delivers its programmes through 39 Area Based Partnership Companies in the most disadvantaged areas of Ireland. Area Partnerships are supported by the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) in achieving local development through the promotion of sustainable enterprise. Partnerships include refugees and asylum seekers as a significant target group. Each Partnership develops an Area Action Plan geared to the needs of its area. Support is aimed particularly at the long-term unemployed and excluded and marginalised people. The Partnerships work closely with LES. Although they vary between Partnerships, among the support that Partnerships provide are:

- business, financial and legal advice;
- bookkeeping and financial training;
- mentoring and enterprise networks;
- pre-enterprise training and training in sales and marketing;
- secretarial support services;
- start-up finance, through grants or revolving loans;
- incubation units for start-up businesses.

Enterprise Boards – There are 35 city and county enterprise boards, which operate independently under a Board of Management. They were established by the government in 1993 to provide a new source of support to companies with ten or fewer employees. They are supported by the government (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment) and the EU.

The Equality Authority – an independent body set up under the Employment Equality Act, 1998. This act and the Equal Status Act, 2000, outlaw discrimination in employment, vocational training, advertising, collective agreements, the provision of goods and services and other opportunities to which the public generally have access on nine distinct grounds, including race.

NGOs and Non-Statutory Agencies – Dublin Area⁶

Access Ireland (Refugee Social Integration Project) – originally a sub-project of the Irish Refugee Council. Access Ireland views integration as a two-way process between the host population and refugees and seeks to explore and foster ways for people to become integrated into their adopted country without abandoning their own culture.

Association of Refugees & Asylum Seekers in Ireland (ARASI) – Founded by refugees and asylum seekers, ARASI works throughout Ireland, particularly in relation to issues of racism and human rights. It published a report in March 2002: *Opportunity Knocks? Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Work in Ireland*.

Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) – represents and provides economic, commercial, employee relations and social affairs services to some 7000 companies and organisations from all sectors of economic and commercial activity. A number of recommendations were put forward by IBEC in a study in March 2000 entitled *Employment of Non-EU Nationals/Refugees in Ireland: Employers' and*

⁶ This list is incomplete and refers to just some of the many agencies working to support refugees and asylum seekers in the Dublin area.

Refugees' Experience,⁷ which included an awareness raising campaign in conjunction with employers and trade unions in relation to overcoming the barriers to employment affecting refugees and non-EU nationals. The recommendations also related to employment, training and policy development (including verification of qualifications).

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) – the umbrella organisation for trade unions in Ireland, representing almost 750,000 working people, both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland. A Liaison Group was established in May 2000 between ICTU, representatives of affiliated unions and voluntary and community organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers. ICTU is part of the "Interact Consortium" (with employers and refugee and asylum groups) whose aims are to maximise access to employment for refugees, and to promote a labour market open to all.

Irish Refugee Council (IRC) – works to promote the cause of refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland, including promoting the adoption of progressive and humane refugee policies. The IRC has commissioned research into a number of areas of concern to asylum seekers and refugees and has lobbied the government over the right to work for asylum seekers. The IRC has an office in Ennis, Co. Clare, as well as in Dublin.

Refugee Information Service (RIS) – established to provide professional assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, including information relating to the right to work, education and training.

Spiritan Asylum Services (SPIRASI) – offers a range of educational training services to refugees and asylum seekers and incorporates the Centre for the Care of Survivors of Torture (CCST).

Vincentian Refugee Centre (VRC) - offers a range of services to asylum seekers and refugees including language classes and information and advice services on employment and training.

NGOs and Non-Statutory Agencies – Outside Dublin⁸

NASC, Irish Immigrant Support Centre, Cork – seeks to respond to the needs of the growing number of immigrants in Munster. As well as serving as a social space the centre offers education and training programmes to refugees and asylum seekers. NASC recently published a detailed report entitled *The Needs of Asylum Seekers in Cork* (2002).

Galway Refugee Support Group, Galway – Provides practical support to refugees and asylum seekers in Galway. Services include: activities towards social integration, children's education and support and English and computer classes for adults.

Tralee Refugee and Asylum Seeker Network (TRASNET) – a voluntary support network for asylum seekers and refugees. It works to help the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into the local community and provides a number of services.

Development Organisation for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (DORAS Luimni) – provides a range of services for refugees and asylum seekers, including language classes, computer training and help with cultural orientation.

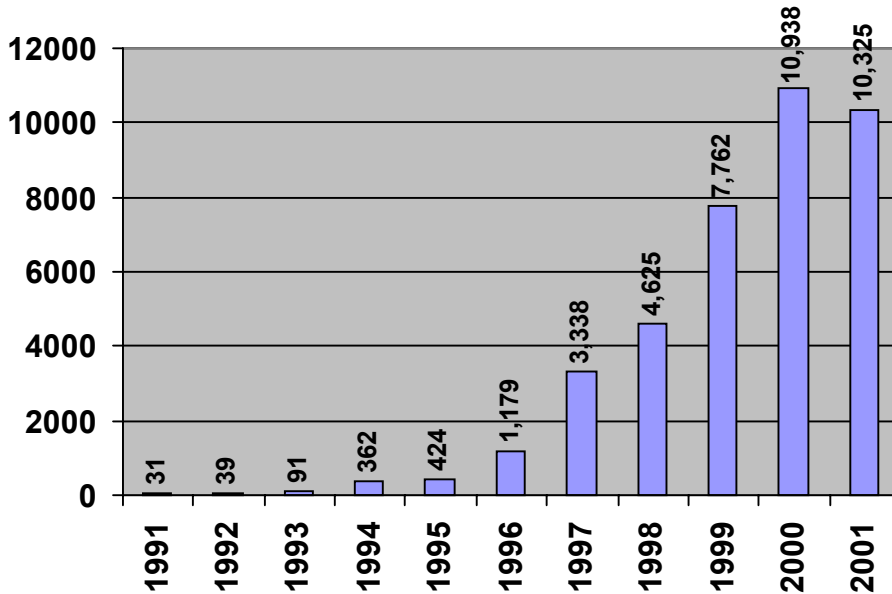
⁷ IBEC Survey Unit (2000), *Employment of Non-EU Nationals/Refugees in Ireland: Employers' and Refugees' Experience*, Dublin: IBEC. P. vii

⁸ This list is incomplete and refers to just some of the most established agencies outside Dublin; there are in fact over 100 groups, agencies and organisations working to support refugees and asylum seekers outside the Dublin region.

SECTION 3: ASYLUM PROCEDURE, LEGAL STATUS AND STATISTICAL DATA

During the early 1990s the number of asylum seekers increased gradually in Ireland. However, from 1996 this number began to increase dramatically, reaching a peak in the year 2000, when 10,938 people applied for recognition as refugees under the 1951 UN Geneva Convention (see Figure 1.1 below). From January to the end of June this year, 5085 people submitted an application for recognition as a refugee to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

Figure 1.1: Number of Asylum Applications Submitted in Ireland, 1991 – 2001

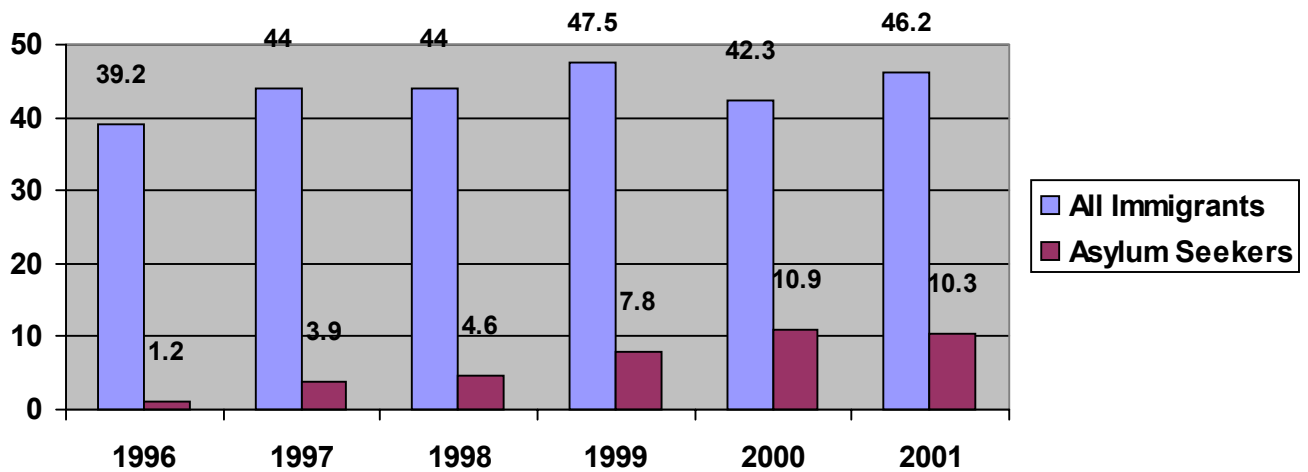


Source: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

The 1990s represented an era of unprecedented economic growth in Ireland and the outward migration that had characterised much of Ireland's recent historical experience was reversed. Looking at the figures regarding asylum applications in the context of total immigration figures for Ireland in the late 1990s, it can be observed that asylum seekers represent a minor but growing percentage of those who migrate to Ireland annually (see Figure 1.2 below). For example, in 2001 24,200 EU citizens immigrated to Ireland and of this number 18,200 were returning Irish citizens. Furthermore 40,184 Non-EU Work Permits, Working Visas and Authorisations were issued. In the same year 10,325 asylum seekers entered the country, representing less than one in seven of the total immigrants arriving in Ireland that year.⁹

⁹ The Irish Commission for Justice & Peace and Trocaire (2002), *Refugees and Asylum Seekers – A challenge to Solidarity*, Dublin: Trocaire/Irish Commission for Justice & Peace.

Figure 1.2: Asylum Applications in the Context of Total Irish Immigration Figures, 1996 – 2001



Source: Collins, A. 2002. *The Needs of Asylum Seekers in Cork*, Cork: NASC, The Irish Immigrant Support Centre. (Rounded to the nearest thousand)

Background

Prior to the introduction of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) and its full implementation in November 2000, when the 1951 UN Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was given statutory effect, Ireland “discharged its responsibilities to asylum seekers and refugees by way of an ‘informal agreement’ between the Department of Justice and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).”¹⁰

The 1996 Act (as amended) considered issues with regard to residence, health care and social welfare. However, it did not consider the right to work. It also provided for an independent refugee commissioner, the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC), a Refugee Appeals Board, and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT), both statutory, independent bodies under the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended).

In the first instance, an application for declaration as a refugee will be dealt with by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioners. On appeal, if one is sought, the claim will be dealt with by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal and in the final instance a decision may be taken by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on a discretionary basis.

Applicants are entitled to consult a solicitor, free of charge, provided by the Refugee Legal Service (RLS), an independent body providing legal assistance to those applying for a declaration as a refugee. Information regarding this service is provided in leaflet form when an applicant makes an initial application. Furthermore, information relating to accommodation and welfare and healthcare support is also made available at this stage through the Information Pack of the RIA.

An asylum seeker will be required to fill out an application form for a declaration as a refugee at the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner; this application must be accompanied by original

¹⁰ Cullen, P. (2000), *Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland*, Cork: Cork University Press

travel documents and originals of all identity documents in possession of the applicant. An initial interview will be scheduled to establish the grounds on which the applicant is making their declaration and to establish identity, nationality, ethnic origin and other relevant information as requested. Furthermore, the applicant will be photographed and, if over 14 years of age, have their fingerprints taken.

Applicants will then be given a questionnaire which must be completed within a certain timeframe. On submission of the questionnaire the applicant will be issued with a Temporary Residence Certificate (with photograph). The applicant will be accommodated at a Reception Centre for a brief period in the Dublin area before being relocated to other accommodation, usually outside Dublin, where they will be expected to remain until their application has been processed. Those applying at an initial port of entry will be directed to follow the above procedures by an immigration official.¹¹

Following the introduction of “direct provision” in April 2000, newly arriving asylum seekers receive full-board accommodation in reception centres throughout the country and are no longer entitled to full rates of supplementary assistance. Adults receive a weekly benefit of €19.05 and €9.50 per child.¹² There are a total of 78 accommodation centres located in every county in Ireland apart from Co. Cavan. The highest capacity centres are located in Cork, Dublin, Galway and Meath with a total capacity of 3224 spaces or approximately 50% of the total number of spaces. Since the introduction of the policies of “direct provision” and “dispersal” in April 2000 the RIA, under the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, has arranged accommodation for 14,000 asylum seekers. In October 2001 there were over 5000 asylum seekers in direct provision in 77 centres.¹³

Research suggests that levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the accommodation in such centres are very low, due to the lack of available sleeping and living space, washing facilities and cooking facilities. Tensions have been noted among people of similar and differing ethnic origins sharing limited, communal space, and in particular the needs of children are felt to be poorly met.¹⁴

Legal Statuses for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Ireland has a number of different types of status that can be granted to asylum seekers:

- Convention Refugee – defined in Section 2 of the Refugee Act, 1996, as:

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

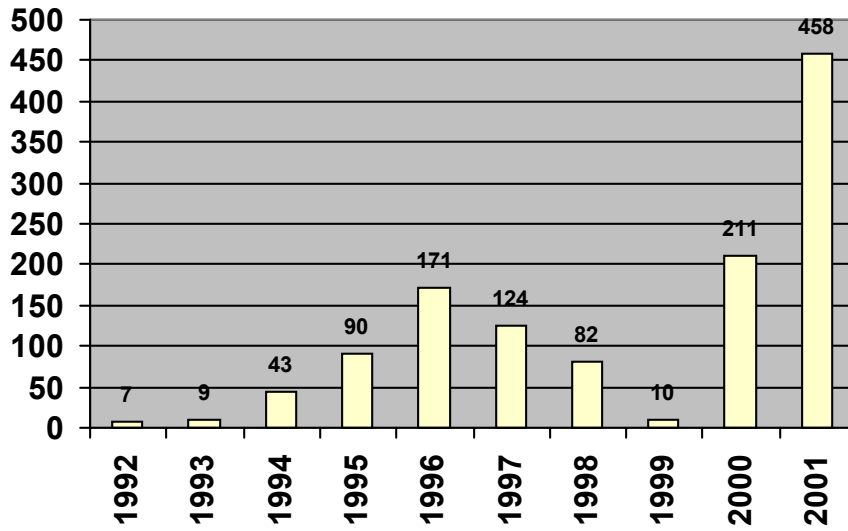
¹¹ Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, *Information Leaflet for Applicants for Refugee Status in Ireland*, Dublin: <http://www.justice.ie>

¹² Fanning, B. et al. (2001), *Beyond the Pale: Asylum-Seeking Children and Social Exclusion in Ireland*, Dublin: Irish Refugee Council. p. 1

¹³ Collins, A. (2002), *The Needs of Asylum Seekers in Cork*, Cork: NASC, The Irish Immigrant Support Centre. p. 10

¹⁴ Collins, A. (2002), op. cit. p. 18 and Fanning, B. et al. (2001), op. cit. p. 2

Figure 1.3: Recognition Rates in Ireland for Convention Refugee Status, 1992 – 2001



Source: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

- Programme Refugee – defined under section 24 of the Refugee Act, 1996, as:

A person to whom leave to enter and remain in the State for temporary protection or resettlement as part of a group of persons has been given by the Government...whether or not such person is a refugee within the meaning of the definition of “refugee” in section 2.

Convention Refugees are those who are invited by the Government of Ireland (usually at the request of the UNHCR) in response to humanitarian crises. At the end of January 2001 the total number of Programme Refugees in Ireland was 2214, of whom 37% were Vietnamese, 54% were Bosnian, 7% were Kosovar and 2% were quota refugees.¹⁵

- Asylum Seeker – a person who has entered the state making an application for declaration as a refugee under the 1951 UN Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol. Figure 1.4 below shows the top five countries of origin for Asylum Seekers entering Ireland in 2002 (until end June).

Figure 1.4: Top Five Countries of Origin 2002 (end June) **Total: 5085**

Country	Asylum seekers entering Ireland
Nigeria	1764 (35%)
Romania	603 (12%)
Moldova	272 (5%)
Zimbabwe	231 (5%)
Poland	186 (4%)
Other	2029 (39%)

Source: Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner

¹⁵ Ward, T. (2001), *Immigration and Residency in Ireland*, Dublin: City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee. p. 8 (Source: Refugee Agency).

- Leave to Remain on Humanitarian Grounds – granted on a discretionary basis by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Compared to other European countries Ireland does not make much use of “humanitarian leave to remain”.¹⁶ Ireland’s total recognition rate (including refugee status and humanitarian leave to remain) is 6% for 2001 according to figures from UNHCR. Aside from Austria, with a total recognition rate of 4%, Ireland has the lowest recognition rate in the EU.¹⁷ Figure 1.5 shows the numbers of people granted Humanitarian Leave to Remain for the period 1997 – 2002 (end January).

Figure 1.5: Number of People granted Humanitarian Leave to Remain, 1997 – 2002 (Jan)

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002 (Jan)
Number	120	27	38	19	70	17

Source: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

- Leave to Remain of the Basis of Parentage of an Irish Born Child or Residency on the Basis of an Irish Born Child – Ireland is one of the few countries in Europe which grants citizenship automatically to any child born in its territory.¹⁸ Parents of Irish born children have a constitutional right to residency following a Supreme Court decision in 1990 (the Fajujonu case). Children of asylum seekers born in Ireland automatically become Irish citizens and their parents then become eligible for residency which is renewable, usually on an annual basis. It should be noted that residency rights for parents (and siblings) of Irish born children are automatically lost if the child dies. The 1990 decision is currently being challenged by the government through the courts and a Supreme Court hearing is scheduled for November of this year which may have far reaching implications for those currently or potentially eligible for residency on this basis. Figure 1.6 below shows the figures for current or former asylum seekers who have been granted Leave to Remain on the basis of Parentage of an Irish Born Child.

Figure 1.6: Number of Current or Former Asylum Seekers who have been granted Leave to Remain on the Basis of an Irish Born Child, 1996 – 2001

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Number	142	107	0	1,227	909	2,489

Source: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

There are a number of other identifiable categories. However, for the purposes of this report we will concentrate on those identified above.

¹⁶ Faughnan, P. and Woods, M. (2000), *Lives on Hold – Seeking Asylum in Ireland*, Dublin: Social Science Research Centre, UCD. p. 15.

¹⁷ Refugee Project of the Irish Bishops’ Conference (2002), *Sanctuary*, No. 18, July 2002.

¹⁸ The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2001). *Second Report on Ireland*

SECTION 4: EDUCATION SYSTEM IN IRELAND – ENTITLEMENTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND SERVICES

While refugees and individuals with humanitarian leave to remain are entitled to the same access to education and training as Irish nationals, this is not so for asylum seekers or those with residency on the basis of an Irish born child. These latter two groups (significantly more numerous than the other two groups) do not have the right to access state-funded education. However the Department of Education's White Paper, *Learning for Life* (2000), does recommend that asylum seekers should have "free access to adult literacy, English language and mother culture supports".¹⁹ Currently most language provision for asylum seekers is provided for by voluntary agencies, NGOs and through many VECs. For the most part, however, training is provided for on a somewhat ad hoc basis. Therefore asylum seekers are excluded from both further education (including some vocational training programmes) and higher educational programmes while they await a decision on their application for a declaration as a refugee.

Integrate Ireland Language and Training Project (IILT)

Established originally under the Department of Education and Science (which provides most of its funding) and now a campus company of Trinity College Dublin, IILT provides state-funded English language training for refugees and those with humanitarian leave to remain. A low level of English language proficiency was consistently identified as one of the major barriers facing refugees in their efforts to access educational services and employment. IILT is currently developing materials for use with refugees and coordinating language support for refugees and those with legal residency. IILT plans to broaden its remit beyond the Dublin area, according to representatives of the RIA. IILT also provides training to teachers working with non-national pupils in primary and post-primary schools. Research is currently being carried out in conjunction with the VEC, IVEA (Irish Vocational Educational Agency) and NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) to assess the language needs of asylum seekers and to look at models of good practice in relation to the provision of services and to develop and pilot courses for asylum seekers via trained tutors. The service is not currently available to asylum seekers.

The Education System in Ireland²⁰

Further Education and Training Programmes occur after second-level schooling but are not part of the third-level system. These include labour market programmes such as Post-Leaving Certificate courses (PLC courses) and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme for the unemployed (VTOS); these are mostly provided by VECs. Under VTOS, participants keep their social welfare entitlements. In both instances candidates should be over 21 years of age and have been registered unemployed for six months. There are also Adult Literacy and Community Education programmes and self-funded part-time adult programmes in second-level schools. There are also a number of options available through a range of training agencies including Fás (Ireland's national training and employment authority), Cert (the national body responsible for training and development in the Irish tourism and hospitality industry) and Teagasc (the national body providing research, training and advice for the agri-food industry in Ireland).

¹⁹ Department of Education and Science (2000). *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*, Dublin: Department of Education and Science. p. 174

²⁰ Source: Department of Education and Science.

Also available under the auspices of Fás are a number of apprenticeships (designated trades, including engineering, construction, motor, electrical), which take place in the workplace, at Fás training centers and at Institutes of Technology.

Access to state-funded third-level institutions in Ireland is also only available to refugees and those with legal residency in Ireland. Applications for course admission are principally made through the Central Applications Office (CAO) which are then forwarded to the appropriate university or institute. Under current procedures, the decision to accept students who achieved their qualifications outside the EU is made on an individual basis, often in an interview situation with the university department to which the candidate has applied. Refugees applying for a place at a third-level institute must have been resident in an EU country for three of the previous five years in order to be eligible as an EU student and therefore qualify for a grant and free fees. In many instances refugees have attained their refugee status within a shorter timeframe and will have to wait until they have been resident for three years before becoming eligible for state financial support. Otherwise refugees must apply as international students and will be eligible to pay often prohibitively high fees with no state support for living expenses.

Admissions officers within universities referred to a number of difficulties, particularly with regard to documentation, both in relation to the candidate's legal status and in relation to prior learning experiences. For English language proficiency for entrance to third-level institutions, the standard criteria is the IELTS examination; however, many colleges are willing to consider applicants who can prove in an interview situation and/or through other English language qualifications that they have a sufficient level of English language proficiency to follow their chosen course. The general situation is that the process operates on a rather ad hoc basis and that individual colleges have developed their own systems for assessing potential candidates which are often not formalised or consistent. There are very few institutional structures available for assessing and accrediting prior learning.

Higher education within Ireland has traditionally focused on younger learners coming through the Irish secondary system and as a result the system is less flexible with regard to mature students (for example, in relation to eligibility criteria for courses or child care provision), and to students who have achieved their secondary schooling outside Ireland, particularly outside the EU. Many administrative officers in third-level institutions referred to frustration with the Department of Education and Science in not supporting fees and grants for part-time courses. The fees structure is laid down by the Department of Education and Science and does not cover part-time third-level courses. In this context adult learners (including refugees) may often have domestic responsibilities that prohibit them from studying on a full-time basis; this is one area that should be addressed.

In terms of financial support from the state within third-level structures, all eligible students (i.e. Irish and EU applicants or those who qualify as such) will have their tuition fees paid automatically. Higher education grants are available to students participating in full-time courses at publicly funded institutions. These grants are administered via local County Councils and VECs. Eligibility is ascertained through means assessment. The full entitlement is currently €2,510 per annum.

Under the Back to Education Programme, administered by local authorities, individuals over the age of 21 and in receipt of certain social welfare payments for a period exceeding six months can access full-time courses at second- and third-level publicly funded institutes while maintaining their social welfare payments and retaining all secondary benefits. They will also receive an annual one-off payment, a Cost of Education Allowance, of €254. The award is not means tested and participants are permitted to work part-time during term and full-time during holidays without losing their benefit. In the academic year 2000/01 5314 people participated in the scheme, of whom 4431 attended third-level institutions.

Beyond traditional grants and fees provided by the Department of Education and Science there are very few forms of student maintenance and support available. Ireland does not have a strong tradition of private sponsorship programmes for students. Consequently such options are not widely known about and are often difficult to access.

All of the above programmes are only available to refugees and those with humanitarian leave to remain, as are all state-funded education and training initiatives; access is denied to asylum seekers. Aside from the provision by the Department of Education for asylum seekers without the right to work to access literacy, English language and mother culture support through VECs, asylum seekers have no state-funded educational or vocational provision available to them. A number of voluntary agencies offer various courses, including English language training, computer classes, job skills and orientation programmes. While these classes are usually free, they do not normally carry accreditation.

SECTION 5: EMPLOYMENT

Labour Market Needs - Skill Shortages

In 2000 the government introduced a work visa and authorisation scheme designed to overcome labour market shortages in designated sectors for non-EEA nationals. These sectors are:

- Nursing
- Information and Computing Technology
- Architecture
- Construction Engineers
- Quantity Surveying
- Building Surveying
- Town Planning.

In May 2001 a number of specialised areas from within the healthcare sector were added to this list. Work visas are normally granted for a period of two years.²¹

Entitlements to Work

Refugees, individuals with leave to remain on humanitarian grounds and those with residency on the basis of an Irish born child all have the right to work in Ireland. Asylum seekers who are still awaiting a decision on their application do not have the right to work. The government decided in July 1999 that asylum seekers who had made their application for declaration as a refugee more than one year prior to 27th July 1999 were granted the right to work. This right was extended to all those who had applied for refugee status on or before 27th July 1999 and who would subsequently be in the state for 12 months. By 30th June 2000 the number of asylum seekers with the right to work stood at 3241.²² Furthermore, those asylum seekers who qualified under this provision had the right to job preparation and some training placements with the Fás Asylum Seekers Unit (This unit closed in March 2002.).

However, an asylum seeker who fulfilled the established criteria and who was granted the right to work did not have the same rights and entitlements as those with refugee status and there is a significant lack of support structures to assist their entry into the labour market. The right to work meant a change in welfare entitlements for eligible asylum seekers, shifting the responsibility for payments from the Health Boards (Social Assistance) to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (Unemployment Assistance). Fanning et al. (2000) note the following inconsistency in this regard:

As social welfare recipients asylum seekers were required to be eligible for employment. As with other recipients...they were also required to supply documentary evidence within a six-week period to demonstrate that they were actively seeking work. However, unlike other unemployed groups, asylum seekers ... did not have the same entitlements to employment training. They were not considered eligible to participate in welfare schemes until they had been in receipt of employment assistance for more than 12

²¹ Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

²² Fanning, B. et al. (2000), *Asylum Seekers and the Right to Work in Ireland*, Dublin: Irish Refugee Council/Combat Poverty Agency. Pg. 4.

months. Only after this period could they become eligible for schemes to improve their access to the labour market, such as community employment and the back-to-work allowance scheme.²³

Such asylum seekers were also not eligible to participate in other Fás training programmes outside of the comparatively limited services provided by the Fás Asylum Seekers Unit. Like the indigenous unemployed, but without access to supporting programmes that facilitate entry into the labour market, asylum seekers were faced with often insurmountable barriers to finding suitable employment.

Unemployment and Underemployment Rates among Refugees

Precise figures are not available to identify the precise degree to which refugees and those with the right to work are experiencing unemployment or underemployment. However, research within the area of refugees/asylum seekers and employment would indicate that both communities experience extremely high levels of unemployment. (Refer to Bibliography for reports relating to this issue). Fanning et al. (2000) note that in relation to those asylum seekers granted permission to work as outlined above, “Figures from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs show that by the end of June 2000, only 1,032 out of 3,241 asylum seekers entitled to work had either found work or had ceased to claim social welfare payments for other reasons.”²⁴

Information

In the course of this study it became increasingly clear that access to information for refugees and asylum seekers with the right to work is often extremely difficult. As can be observed in relation to information provision generally for the refugee community “monocultural assumptions upon which public services are based”²⁵ in Ireland create barriers to obtaining information regarding individuals’ rights and/or entitlements. The majority of respondents in the study stressed the difficulties and frustrations that refugees encounter when trying to access information on a number of levels. Once again, English language proficiency was highlighted as one of the major barriers in accessing information. Respondents also referred to institutional apathy with regard to overcoming such barriers. The civil service is generally perceived as unwilling to address the issue of making information available within a multicultural context. This perception of apathy on the part of many statutory bodies was felt by many participants in the study to be indicative of a high level of institutional racism.

Recruitment Process, Job Search and Labour Market Orientation

The mechanisms for applying for jobs and recruiting employees are of course wide ranging, but research in this area would indicate that refugees and asylum seekers with the right to work face enormous barriers to moving beyond the first stage of applying for a job. Fanning et al. (2000) note that, despite a high level of motivation and a large number of applications for jobs, the majority of participants in the study remained unsuccessful in accessing employment. The study observed that most looked for work through job advertisements and to a lesser extent through personal contacts. However, “while asylum seekers sometimes learned about employment opportunities through personal contacts, this rarely led to concrete offers of employment. Asylum seekers generally perceived themselves to be excluded

²³ Fanning B. et al. (2000), op cit. p. 12.

²⁴ Ibid, pg. 4.

²⁵ Ibid, pg. 64.

from the social networks in which Irish people heard about job opportunities. They therefore lacked social capital, that is they lacked the access to specific social positions which comes through contacts and networks. This shows that though networks can provide information, they don't always secure employment. There are other more restricted networks which actually decide which applicant secures a job"²⁶

The study goes on to note that many went on to access low-paid, part-time or temporary work for which they were overqualified. Furthermore, many of those interviewed were unaware of the supports available from Fás, and in many instances, because of lack of clarity of information, many thought they were not entitled to any support from Fás, and relied on "their limited knowledge of Irish employment markets and restricted personal contacts".²⁷

In addition to the failure of employers to recognise skills and qualifications obtained outside Ireland, asylum seekers and refugees face other barriers to accessing the labour market in Ireland. Fanning et al. (2000) drew a number of conclusions on the basis of their research in relation to the orientation of Irish employers. These can be summed up as follows. Firstly, due to conservatism on the part of employers in relation to recruitment practices with which they are familiar, candidates who have gained their qualifications and/or experience in Ireland are favoured over candidates from less familiar countries. Secondly, racism and discrimination meant that many of those interviewed felt that even if their skills and qualifications were recognised they would not have been given the job and that employers found other excuses not to employ them. Thirdly, historical experience means that excess supply in the labour market has led to employers being used to a large supply of overqualified candidates and they have failed to adapt to changing labour market supply, continuing to depend on social networks and informal advertising procedures.²⁸

Recognition of Qualifications

The perception of institutional apathy by many participants in the study was borne out, to some extent, by the researcher's experience with representatives of some of the statutory agencies, which have high levels of contact with refugees and asylum seekers. In conversation with some representatives of statutory agencies the researcher encountered a lack of seriousness with regard to refugees' educational qualifications, work and prior learning experiences. The implicit assumption was frequently conveyed that a refugee could not necessarily be believed in relation to their experience prior to coming to Ireland. Such assumptions are extremely difficult to overcome in the context of very few standard mechanisms for verifying and recognising prior learning and experience. The net effect of this is that refugees whose prior experience is not recognised may need to retrain in order to obtain qualifications already obtained or to take up employment that does not reflect their skills and experience, which in reality often means lower paid employment, leading to low quality housing and often increasing marginalisation and further social exclusion.

It was suggested by a number of participants in the study that FREE could contribute to resolving difficulties around recognition of qualifications. Fás indicated that this was one of their major areas of concern with regard to not only refugees but all non-nationals working in Ireland. Despite this concern, very little appears to have been achieved in real terms towards overcoming this barrier. Fás are, however, looking at the development of further provision for refugees and are drawing up good practice guidelines, implementing race awareness training for staff and enhancing and developing services and support for

²⁶ Ibid, p. 41.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 43.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 45.

refugees. Fás see their organisation as the primary mechanism for delivering vocational training and employment services to refugees in a mainstream environment. If Fás is to achieve this, it is essential that the agency is committed to resolving the issue of recognition of qualifications and prior learning.

Regulations and Funding for Setting Up Businesses

Refugees, people with leave to remain on humanitarian grounds and those with leave to remain on the basis of parentage of an Irish born child have the right to establish a business. Assistance and support is available through many of the Area Partnerships and through the network of enterprise boards throughout the country. Many of the Partnerships have business development managers or enterprise support units which provide guidance and support for individuals wishing to set up their own businesses. There are 35 city and county enterprise boards, all of which operate independently under a Board of Management. They were established by the government in 1993 to provide a new source of support to companies with ten or fewer employees. They are supported by the government (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment) and the EU. Enterprise Boards offer grants (including repayable capital grants) and financial support as well as business advice, mentoring and information to individuals wishing to establish small businesses. They are also involved in management training and deliver public workshops on setting up businesses.

Job Schemes, Relevant Government Schemes for the Unemployed

According to Pat Guerin, *“anomalies in the Irish Welfare system... [mean] that time spent on Supplementary Welfare, during the period in which they were not entitled to work, is not eligible as accumulated time to qualify for entry to Back to Work Schemes. In order to qualify for entry to Back to Work Schemes must be on the live register for a period of fifteen months. Someone who has recently been granted Refugee Status or an asylum seeker granted residency rights on some other basis is thereby discouraged from seeking employment immediately or is alternatively penalised (through loss of benefits, allowances) for doing so.”*²⁹

While there are a number of government schemes designed to assist access to employment, the general feeling among many of the agencies interviewed was that these courses are difficult to access for refugees and do not recognise the particular needs of refugees. Furthermore, many agencies felt that until the government specifically sought to include refugees within their remit these forms of exclusion would persist. The shortage of schemes available to refugees to provide orientation within the Irish labour market, pre-employment training, CV and interview skills training and other training to facilitate labour market access, compounded by inadequate English language training, may lock refugees into a cycle of unemployment, under employment and welfare dependency. The closure of the Fás Asylum Seekers Unit in March 2002 has compounded these problems. It has been widely observed that voluntary agencies, often operating with very limited resources, are struggling to fill the gap left by inadequate and sometimes inappropriate statutory services.

Social Benefit System

Most social welfare support is delivered through the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. As a result of the implementation of “direct provision”, asylum seekers are no longer entitled to

²⁹ Guerin, Pat. (2002), *Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Work in Ireland*, Dublin: ARASI. p. 5

full rates of supplementary assistance and are accommodated on a full-board basis at accommodation centers throughout the country. Adults receive a weekly benefit of €19.05 and €9.50 per child. Refugees and those with humanitarian leave to remain or leave to remain on the basis of parentage of an Irish born child have the same social welfare entitlements as Irish citizens, as well as the same access to medical care and to go on the social housing list.

Current welfare entitlements are:

- Unemployment Benefit – when an individual has paid PRSI (pay related social insurance) and is actively seeking employment. It is €118.80 per week.
- Unemployment Assistance – when an individual has not made PRSI contributions. It is means tested and goes up to a maximum of €118.80 with provision for extra assistance if the applicant has dependent children.
- Lone Parent Allowance – €118.80 with additional child benefit of €117.60 for the first and second children and €147.30 for third and fourth children.
- Rent Allowance – administered by the Local Health Boards.

Asylum Seekers Without the Right to Work

The overwhelming feeling among agencies contacted for participation in the study and working on the ground with asylum seekers is that asylum seekers should be granted the right to work no later than six months after entering the country. A significant amount of research has been carried out in relation to the right to work and a number of agencies are involved in lobbying the government to reconsider its position on this issue, in particular the Irish Refugee Council.

Asylum seekers without the right to work (that is all asylum seekers who did not qualify under the 1999 government initiative) are generally recognised as the most vulnerable group amongst those of concern to this study. After the introduction of the policy of “direct provision” in April 2000 the welfare entitlements of asylum seekers have become much more restricted. Fanning et al. (2000) refer to this system as a ‘form of apartheid’. Consistently, during the course of this study in conversation with refugee support agencies, the issue of direct provision has provoked the greatest hostility and dismay. Support workers referred to the isolation, crowding, inadequate facilities and lack of support that asylum seekers in “direct provision” accommodation experience. Much of this is documented in research reports referred to in the bibliography.

SECTION 6: MATRIX OF BARRIERS AND NEEDS

It should be noted that poor English language provision is consistently identified as the single greatest barrier to refugees wishing to participate in educational and vocational training, to access employment and labour market programmes and in general terms for refugees to integrate and to become net contributors within Ireland. It should also be noted that racism was highlighted as one of the greatest barriers for refugees in particular by NGOs and voluntary organisations. A 2000 study by IBEC noted, “When we looked at the total number of responses overall, we find that ‘racism’ was mentioned the most often by over half of the participants, followed by ‘lack of information’ (mentioned by just under half the participants...³⁰ It is therefore imperative that anti-racism and cultural awareness training should be delivered to all statutory and non-statutory training bodies and service providers, to all educational establishments, to all workplaces and to employers’ and employees’ representative bodies. Furthermore, lack of adequate childcare supports were identified by many participants as a significant barrier to accessing services and employment and such provision would be a necessary element for many refugees and asylum seekers.

Topics	Barriers	Needs
Language Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum Seekers entitled to very limited English language training, often on an ad hoc basis. ▪ Refugees are entitled to services but these are limited in capacity. ▪ Where courses are available they are not necessarily appropriate to the learners’ needs. ▪ Lack of accreditation for courses. ▪ Lack of childcare facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers should be entitled to appropriate English language training. ▪ Where language training and support is available it should be standardized and appropriate for learners needs. ▪ Need to develop a coordinated approach to service delivery country-wide. ▪ More funding required. ▪ Courses should be accredited. ▪ Language courses should be expanded to include jobs skills training and other programmes to assist refugees in making the transition to the labour market. ▪ Development of adequate childcare facilities.
Access to higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers are not entitled to access publicly funded higher education courses. ▪ Only full-time courses are supported by grants and other state financial supports, fees etc. ▪ Refugees are only eligible for state financial support on a par with Irish/EU candidates if 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consideration should be made by the Department of Education for asylum seekers who may wish to access third-level education. ▪ Grants and other state support should be available to students wishing to follow part-time third-level courses. ▪ The system should be more

³⁰ IBEC Survey Unit, 2000, op. cit. p. xiv

	<p>resident in Ireland for 3 of previous 5 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Higher education system is geared towards school leavers who have passed through the Irish secondary system – inflexible. ▪ Lack of childcare facilities 	<p>flexible to the needs of non-traditional applicants (including non-nationals, particularly from outside the EEA, adult learners etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refugees should be a specifically targeted group within the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness for access to third-level education. ▪ The 3 year EU residency rule should be waived for refugees. ▪ Development of adequate childcare facilities.
Access to vocational training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers are not entitled to vocational training. ▪ Refugees find it difficult to access information regarding vocational training. ▪ Inflexible system which is still primarily geared towards a monocultural client group. ▪ Experiences of racism and lack of helpfulness when dealing with statutory agencies. ▪ Lack of childcare facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers with the right to work should be given access to the full range of vocational training programmes. ▪ Information providers should reconsider the mechanisms by which clients can access information with regard to state-funded vocational training programmes, to take account of the needs of non-nationals. ▪ Anti-racism training and awareness raising initiatives should be formally incorporated by all state service providers. ▪ Development of adequate childcare facilities.
Recognition of qualifications for education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Currently no formal mechanism for assessing prior learning outside the EU – done on an ad hoc and case by case basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A system/mechanism should be developed for assessing and accrediting prior learning for admission to further and higher educational programmes
Educational system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational system has not yet adapted to the needs of non-nationals. It is geared towards Irish students who pass through the educational system from primary through post-primary and then on to further and higher education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education system needs to be more flexible and open to the needs of non-traditional users including refugees. Appropriate support mechanisms should be put in place to identify and address the needs of refugee students. ▪ Developing courses to bridge the transition for refugees onto mainstream courses could help

		to overcome barriers such as language needs and assist the integration of refugees.
Government-funded training schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers are not entitled to access government-funded training schemes. ▪ Closure of Fás Asylum Seekers Unit. ▪ Difficulties in accessing information, as service providers often assume that all clients access information through the same channels. Research indicates that refugees have very poor access to such information. ▪ Difficulty in accessing information on entitlements to training. ▪ Lack of childcare facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers with the right to work should be entitled to all Fás training services. ▪ Fás should develop mechanisms to cater for the specific needs of refugees as a priority. ▪ Awareness raising, intercultural training and anti-racism training should be provided for staff in statutory agencies providing training to refugees. ▪ Methods for making information accessible to refugees should be developed to overcome the information deficit. ▪ Development of adequate childcare facilities.
Entitlements to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most asylum seekers do not have the right to work. ▪ Refugees have the right to work but experience high levels of unemployment and under employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers should be given the right to work no longer than six months after entering Ireland. ▪ Policy should be developed to ensure that all those with the right to work should be guaranteed the same protections as others in the Irish labour market.
Recognition of qualifications for employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very few mechanisms for recognising qualifications obtained outside Ireland/the EU. No system of accreditation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The key service delivery agencies, employers' representative bodies and accrediting bodies should come together to develop a mechanism for auditing, recognising and accrediting prior educational and learning experiences
Changing of careers and transferring of skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of recognition of qualifications and prior learning, inadequate support for part-time higher education and poor information provision all provide barriers for refugees wishing to change career or to transfer skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mechanisms as outlined above would assist refugees wishing to transfer their skills to a different career, along with greater flexibility in educational training provision with more state financial support, as refugees are often trapped in a cycle of low paid employment.

The recruitment process, job search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inadequate job orientation training in Irish labour market practices. ▪ Lack of pre-employment training programmes, including interview skills and CV writing. ▪ Poor information provision which does not take into account an increasingly multicultural labour market. ▪ Conservatism on the part of employers and traditional methods of informal recruitment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of courses by agencies such as Fás and English language providers in labour market orientation and skills training. ▪ Improved information provision by recruitment bodies including Local Employment Services (LES). ▪ Development of policy in relation to recruitment and employment that recognises the changing nature of the labour market in Ireland and accepts that migration will continue and is part of the future development of Ireland.
Setting up businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of indigenous knowledge and social network that can be crucial to the long-term success of a business. ▪ Highly mobile community which makes refugees unattractive to banks and lending institutions. ▪ Understanding of market orientation and business practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for agencies that provide loans and grants for business start-ups to develop a system of supports for refugees wishing to establish their own business, including mentoring, market orientation and business practice courses and guidance in drawing up an effective business plan. ▪ Provision of Business English language courses.
Government job schemes for the unemployed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers with the right to work are not entitled to access government job schemes for the unemployed. ▪ Poor information provision. ▪ No schemes that address the specific needs of refugees wishing to access pre-employment training schemes. ▪ Length of time spent on Social Welfare before qualifying for access to job schemes. ▪ Lack of childcare facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum seekers with the right to work should be entitled to access all government job schemes. ▪ Improved information provision as outlined above. ▪ Job schemes for the unemployed should be developed that take into account the specific needs of refugees. ▪ Refugees who have already spent a long time on direct provision or supplementary welfare prior to being granted a declaration as a refugee should automatically qualify for government job schemes (Back to Work Schemes). ▪ Development of adequate childcare facilities.

Social Benefit System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Since April 2000, asylum seekers are no longer entitled to full rates of social welfare payments and are accommodated in full-board accommodation (“direct provision”), receiving €19.05 per adult and €9.50 per child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The majority of NGOs agreed that the system of “direct provision” should be abolished and that asylum seekers should be entitled to seek private rented accommodation if they wish, with full supplementary welfare entitlements.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gender discrimination in the labour market – pay related differences, gender discrimination in accessing work commensurate with skills and experience and lower participation of women in labour market in Ireland. ▪ Poorly developed and expensive childcare facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of policies and practices to overcome gender discrimination in labour market in relation to refugee women. ▪ Development of adequate and affordable childcare facilities.

SECTION 7 : CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is possible to observe the following points:

- Rights-Based Approach – The majority of participants representing NGOs and voluntary agencies stressed the need for FREE to take a rights-based approach to the administration of FREE and that human rights issues should inform every stage of the development and implementation of the fund.
- Independence – Again the majority of participants on the project, including both NGOs and statutory agencies, felt that the establishment of an independent agency to administer FREE in Ireland is important. It would appear that an independently managed fund working in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies would be the most (politically) effective and workable alternative.
- Decentralised administration – There was a strong feeling that FREE should be administered locally in Ireland to minimise bureaucracy; however, it was acknowledged that some central administration would improve communication among differing countries to share learning experiences and to inform local project development. Furthermore, in an Irish context, regional representation at some level (i.e. so that the focus should not be on the Dublin area) would be extremely important considering the Irish government’s policy of dispersal. Many asylum seekers may choose to remain in the area to which they have been dispersed on being granted residency. It is important that Dublin should not be perceived as the only place of opportunity.
- Refugee Representation – Once again it was generally agreed among participants that refugees should be consulted at all stages of the development and administration of FREE.
- Business Community – If FREE wishes to engage the interest of private businesses in contributing to the fund, a lot of networking will be absolutely crucial. A great deal more information is essential to achieve this. It will be necessary to engage with employers’ representative bodies and trade unions to overcome employer reluctance and to provide the necessary information to businesses. This is true particularly in relation to private businesses recognising the benefits to the economy, and to society as a whole, in assisting refugees to participate in economic and social life in Ireland by becoming net contributors to the country.
- Political climate – Currently in Ireland there is a general reluctance on the part of many agencies and political representatives to engage with issues concerning refugees. FREE will provide a positive forum offering real benefit to refugees in raising the profile of refugees and facilitating their full participation in Irish society.

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