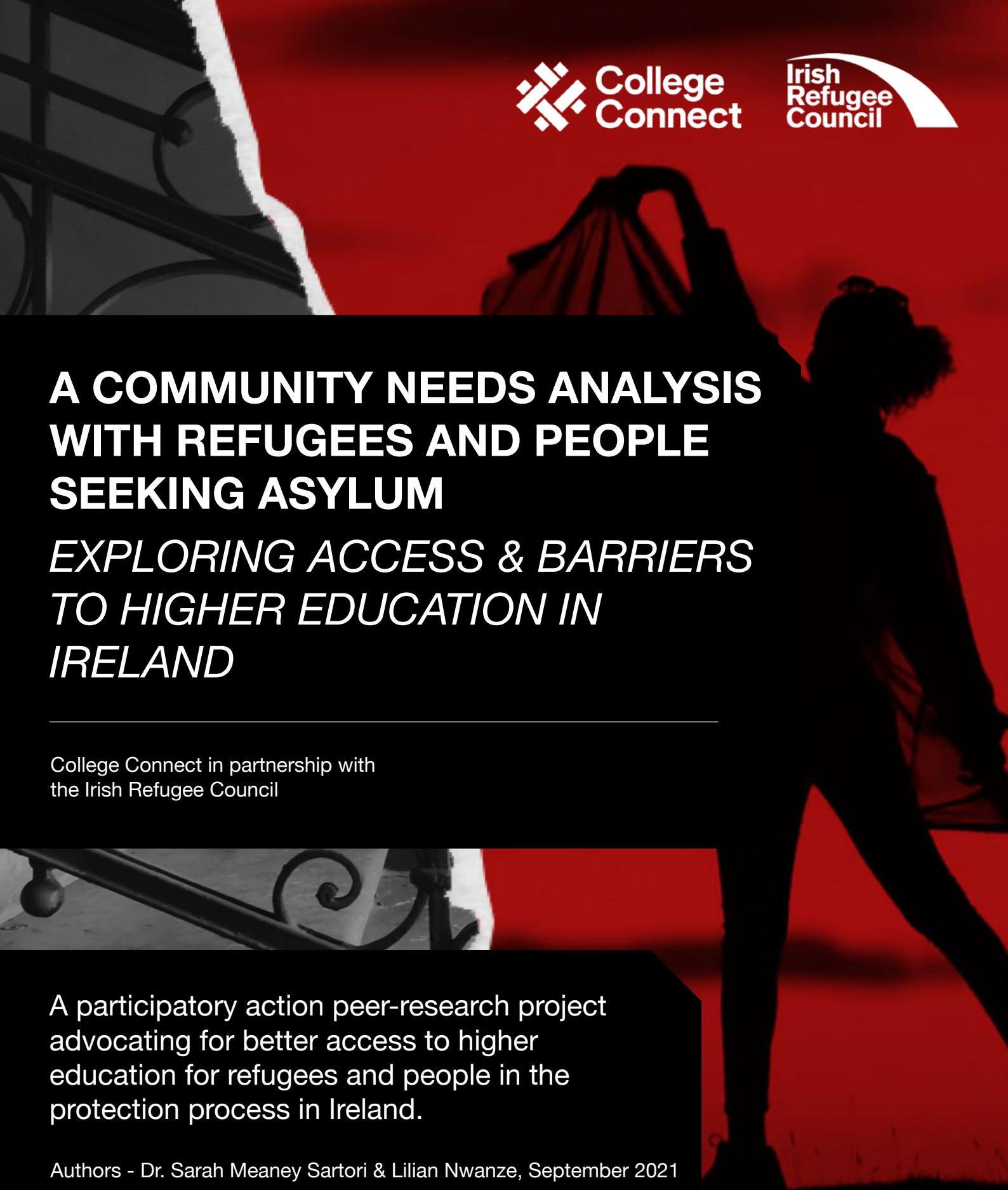

College Connect

Irish Refugee Council

A COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS WITH REFUGEES AND PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

EXPLORING ACCESS & BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND

College Connect in partnership with
the Irish Refugee Council

A participatory action peer-research project advocating for better access to higher education for refugees and people in the protection process in Ireland.

Authors - Dr. Sarah Meaney Sartori & Lilian Nwanze, September 2021

DCU Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath Dublin City University

Dundalk Institute of Technology Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Dhún Dealgan

HEA

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TUS

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From the **research team**: Ronald Kayinga, Zoryana Pshyk, Declan Markey, Archie Sita, Alketa Hotaj, Thubelihle Moyo, Austin Phiri, Sinothi Zithas, Pride Dube, Kinda Nassli and Frank Amarachie.

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From **MASI**: Lucky Khambule, Ronald Kayinga and Bulelani Mfaco

Artists: Catherine Young of Catherine Young Dance, Felicia Olusanya aka Felispeaks, Mufutau Yusuf (dancer), Davide Belotti (film maker), Tyran Lovett (media specialist), Susan Meaney (graphic design), Keith Walsh of Two Pair Films and Fola Ibedokun (artist).

Lastly, but most importantly, our most special thanks and respect goes to the participants who gave so generously of their time and experience to help us understand the barriers they face. We are honoured to have heard your stories, and we strive to represent them and to do them justice.

This report was written by Dr. Sarah Meaney-Sartori and Lilian Nwanze. The report has been peer-reviewed prior to publication. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors.

College Connect 2021

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FOREWORD

A word of thanks - above all else I would like to start by thanking the people who gave their time, shared their opinions, emotions and often difficult journeys in order to make this research possible. Without you, this work would not exist, and our goal of removing barriers to education would be more difficult. Thank you.

Early in 2019 I joined College Connect (CC) Regional Steering Group (RSG). Its aims are to admit students from under-represented groups into higher education. In November 2019, as a member of the RSG I attended the launch of CC's first piece of peer-research on prisoners and former prisoner's access to education. It was an inspiring morning, hearing stories from people who felt the door to education was closed to them, and the life changing impact they experienced when that door opened. Sitting there I wondered what a similar piece of research into the experiences of refugees and protection applicants would teach us and how we might use that research to improve access to education for all the people we work to support. Thankfully in early 2020 CC RSG approved this piece of research which you are now reading.

Twenty years earlier, in 1999, the number of people coming to Ireland seeking protection started to increase and Direct Provision (DP) was created. It was an emergency measure never intended to last over two decades. Much has been written regarding how unfit for purpose it is; the current government has pledged to end DP by 2024 in their 2021 White Paper to End Direct Provision. DP and the reception conditions under which the Irish state cares for protection applicants changed very little between 1999 and 2018. In 2018 Ireland opted into the European Reception Conditions Directive to harmonise how EU member states care for protection applicants, this was the beginning of positive change in Ireland.

I joined the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) in 2015 as Education Officer, very much a voluntary part-time and exploratory role. At that time the State provided primary and secondary education for children, and basic English and IT skills for adults. The vast majority of people arriving into Ireland were adults and very few educational doors were open to them. In 1999 you could argue that our education system was not ready for the arrival of thousands of people with differing educational needs, it reflects poorly on us that it has taken almost two decades to improve that situation. We quickly realised within the IRC that there was a clear need for us to advocate for improvement in access to education. You will read in the following chapters about how that education journey has been very difficult for the majority of people.

Arguably the biggest barrier is how the Irish education system continues to assign 'International student' status to protection applicants. Traditionally the concept of an 'International student' was a person with sufficient social and financial capital to 'choose' to study in Europe outside of their own continent. They come to study and typically return to their home country. Protection applicants do not choose to come to Ireland to study, they left their home country in fear of persecution and come here seeking protection. While waiting several years for our justice system to process their protection application they understandably and laudably want to use that time to prepare to be contributing members of society. International fees are typically around €15,000 per annum, the EU fee typically around €6,000.

An Irish student is required to pay €3,000 as they also receive the Free Fees Initiative, a protection applicant is still required to pay €15,000 per year. Fundamentally protection applicants are not International students as that term was intended.

The Department of Education offered a Pilot Student Support Scheme (similar to SUSI) from 2015 but the criteria were so strict that only 10 people managed to gain approval during the first five years it was in place. The IRC lobbied to have the Scheme's criteria more appropriately set and in August 2020 the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science (DFHERIS) opened the scheme to pathways other than just the Leaving Certificate. In that year alone 40 students received grants to attend further and higher education. Minister Simon Harris should be commended for achieving more in the past 18 months than all his predecessors in the previous 18 years. But we still need to find a solution to Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) quoting €15,000 instead of €3,000 to protection applicants/refugees who are ineligible for the Student Support Scheme/SUSI.

I would also like to highlight the issue of people receiving a stamp 4 permission to remain under 'exceptional' circumstances. In these cases the Department of Justice approves a permission to remain which allows a person to work, to become an entrepreneur and access all social welfare entitlements in the same manner as an Irish citizen, but they are excluded from the SUSI grant. It is in the remit of the Minister for Justice to ensure people do not receive a vague Stamp 4 as an 'exceptional' measure which is then ineligible for SUSI. And it is in the remit of the Minister for DFHERIS to amend the SUSI regulations to accept ALL former protection applicants who receive any stamp 4 as eligible for SUSI.

The research for this report was undertaken predominantly in 2020 and so many of the stories told relate to the situation as it was prior to that year. For context, from 1999 to 2018 protection applicants were also liable for International fees in order to attend a Further Education one year level 5 PLC course; that came with a fee of €3,600 compared to the local fee of approximately €250. This changed when Ireland signed up to the EU Reception Conditions Directive in June 2018 and as a result protection applicants with a work permit could access PLC courses under the VTOS scheme for free. This was useful for those who happened to live near colleges offering VTOS and if they could negotiate the difficult administrative process to get VTOS approved. However in 2021 Minister Simon Harris removed the requirement to pay international fees for PLC and we commend him for removing this barrier.

In 2017 the HEIs also became aware of the barriers faced by protection applicants when trying to access higher education and they began to offer Sanctuary Scholarships to protection applicants; DCU being one of the first, with AIT (now TUS) following in 2018. By 2020 all HEIs offered Sanctuary Scholarships to refugees and protection applicants, some offer just 1 scholarship and some offer 17 on campus scholarships. The University of Sanctuary Ireland designation is now firmly established as the standard to achieve to be a welcoming and inclusive University.

While we can say that the situation has much improved in the past couple of years, and while there are still more barriers that we need to remove, we must not forget or minimise the very real struggle that the participants of this study and the thousands of others they represent have had to face due to the lack of inclusiveness, kindness and humanity they experienced in the years prior to 2018. Ongoing barriers include: the lack of recognition of prior learning which has meant people have suffered a loss of identity as they have to begin again rather

than build on their past life experience and learning; the inability to move close to a HEI to take up a CAO offer has meant deferring or losing that place; the lack of flexibility and kindness in some DPs has meant people going to college hungry as they miss the set meal times; walking very long distances as they are unable to afford the bus fare; unable to attend class due to the lack of childcare; all the while sometimes dealing with racism and a lack of cultural awareness. Much has been achieved and yet still much more to do.

Finally, I would like to thank all the team, past and present, at College Connect who have been so supportive of this Community Needs Analysis during the past couple of years including Emma Gilchreest, Grace Edge, Dr. Rose Ryan, Ayoma Bowe, Declan Markey, Lillian Nwanze, Zoryana Pshyk, Ronald Kayinga, and all the research team who have shown such great solidarity and kindness throughout. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Sarah Meaney Sartori who I can only describe as unwaveringly kind in her approach to this piece of work and every person she met along the way.

Thank You All.

Charlotte Byrne, Education Officer,
Irish Refugee Council,
23 October 2021

SUMMARY

This is a report of a Community Needs Analysis (CNA) carried out by College Connect (a PATH 3 project spanning the four higher education institutions; DkIT, DCU, MU and TUS Athlone) in partnership with the Irish Refugee Council. The report sets out the findings from 40 in-depth interviews and 104 survey responses collected over the period from October 2020 – March 2021, with refugees and people in the protection process in Ireland around their experience of accessing or trying to access higher education. Using a peer-to-peer participatory approach and Photovoice as a methodology, this study captures participants' lived experience. In recognition that there is little research in the Irish context focused on the experiences of refugees and people in the protection process in the higher education system,[1] this report puts participant voice and experience front and centre in an attempt to redress the balance and is primarily concerned with the experiences of the human beings going through the process.

Refugees and international protection applicants are people who have come to Ireland seeking refuge or international protection. The available data for Ireland shows that in 2018 there were 6,041 refugees, and 7,196 international protection applicants/people in the international protection process.[2] By the end of 2020, there were over 5000 pending protection applications lodged in Ireland.[3] In terms of higher education access and widening participation policy, we speak about 'clear and coherent pathways', 'entry routes', 'targeted supports' and 'equity of access'.[4] The legal, historical, and policy complexities coupled with a failure to clarify the rights to higher education for refugees or the duties of the State in this regard,[5] combine to create a highly convoluted maze to third-level education for this cohort that would be challenging for anyone to navigate.

A total of 10 peer-researchers were recruited to carry out this research process in a solution-focused style of research incorporating egalitarian and dialogic involvement.[6] All 10 were either people who had been granted refugee status, leave to remain, or who were at some stage in the international protection application process. The peer-researchers carried out a total of 14 focus group sessions with 39 participants, and a total of 104 survey participants responded to a 15-question survey. The majority of survey respondents; 69 in total, were between the ages of 25 and 44. Only 17 respondents to our survey had never spent time in the Direct Provision system.

1 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). "Chapter 12 Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland". In Refugees and Higher Education. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012

2 UNCHR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) (2019) Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2018. Geneva: UNCHR. Available at https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf.

3 Irish Refugee Council. (2020). Country Report. Asylum Information Database. Ireland: Irish Refugee Council.. [Online] Available at: https://irishrefugeecouncil.eu.rit.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=b8ff096d-8015-4abe-8ad8-55eaffdc4b35

4 HEA. National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019. Available at: https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Plan-for-Equity-of-Access-to-Higher-Education-2015-2019.pdf

5 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.

6 Denzin, N. K. (2010). The qualitative manifesto: A call to arms. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

42 respondents have a prior university qualification from their country origin, and of these, only 13 were successful in getting their qualification recognised in Ireland. 55 people were currently studying in Ireland at the time of this research, with the majority of these (40 respondents) studying at higher education level. The vast majority of survey respondents, 77.9% or 81 people, intended to be studying in Ireland in 2021-2022.

Participants on this research told us how central they viewed the role of education in rebuilding their lives, yet they also told us how in the 'protection process', one's skill-set, sense of self-worth, and identity are deconstructed. Participants unanimously described the extreme difficulties that they encountered in their bid to progress their education and rebuild their lives. Difficulties such as being quoted international college fees despite receiving a meagre weekly allowance and living in a Direct Provision hostel. Barriers such as; not being able to access food or transport while attending college; not being able to get prior education and qualifications recognised; and not being able to access student grants or support schemes due to not having the required residency permissions were frequently cited, and people became visibly upset while speaking of the toll this effort took on their physical and mental health. Conversations with the Syrian community who partook in this research, indicated a fear of becoming involved in Irish society as a result of Islamophobia, and a lack of awareness at all levels of Irish society about Arabic culture.

Non-governmental organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council, Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project, and St Vincent de Paul, were all described as having played a vital role in supporting participants' journey to and through higher education. Similarly for many participants, the University of Sanctuary scholarship scheme and SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) were integral to peoples' educational journeys, while individual acts of kindness and strangers 'going above and beyond' were mentioned by many. However, despite the unanimous accession to the benefits education brings first to the individual and then the community, this research evidences a huge amount of frustration and challenges experienced by international protection applicants and refugees when trying to access higher education in this country. The enormous success associated with receiving a University of Sanctuary scholarship, does not preclude someone from experiencing hunger on campus, or of having to walk long distances on dark dangerous roads, or of experiencing racism or stigmatisation and a feeling of 'separateness', or of needing trauma support in order to be able to function.

As emphasised by Susan Mackey, social worker, and coordinator of NASC's Connect Migrant Youth Project, the legislation underpinning SUSI 'gives the Minister the power to determine what nationality criteria he wants to impose. It would be a simple matter of changing the regulations for the Minister to update the policy.'[7] Participants both in the focus groups and in the survey discussed and highlighted other similar and specific changes that could be made to improve access to higher education for refugees and people in the protection process.

- Remove the requirement of international fees for anyone in the protection process.
- Provide clear and consistent information regarding access to higher education for refugees and people in the protection process.
- Provide access to food for residents of Direct Provision centres attending education.

7 Conneely, A. (2021). Govt urged to widen access to student grants for refugees, migrants. RTE. Available at: https://www.rte.ie/news/2021/0825/1242768-student-grant-refugees/

- Do away with the 'three-year rule' that unnecessarily delays futures for people in the protection process.
- Recognise prior learning from countries of origin as well and the learning gained from navigating the 'protection process'.
- Provide cultural awareness and anti-racism training in our schools, public sector, organisations, and colleges.
- Create avenues to share refugee experience to help reduce stigma and integrate people more inclusively into Irish society.

One of the key findings from this research was in relation to the stigmatisation of refugees and protection applicants, which can manifest as internalised oppression, or as a feeling of having one's identity 'deconstructed' and replaced with that of a 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'. It can also manifest as externalised oppression; the adverse effect of which is evident across the structural systems of; education, health and well-being, and employment.

This research used creative methods from the outset, both to explore participants' experience, as well as to represent findings, as the presentation of the research from multiple perspectives with an ethic of solidarity, shifts focus from the relatable individual, who garners empathy, to the contours of systemic factors effecting a community.[8] The short video 'Deconstructed' featuring spoken word artist Felispeaks and award winning danced Mufutau Yusuf, created with Catherine Young Dance and award winning film-makers Two-Pair Films, was created with this purpose in mind and is available to watch here.

https://youtu.be/h9GLR6XNNog

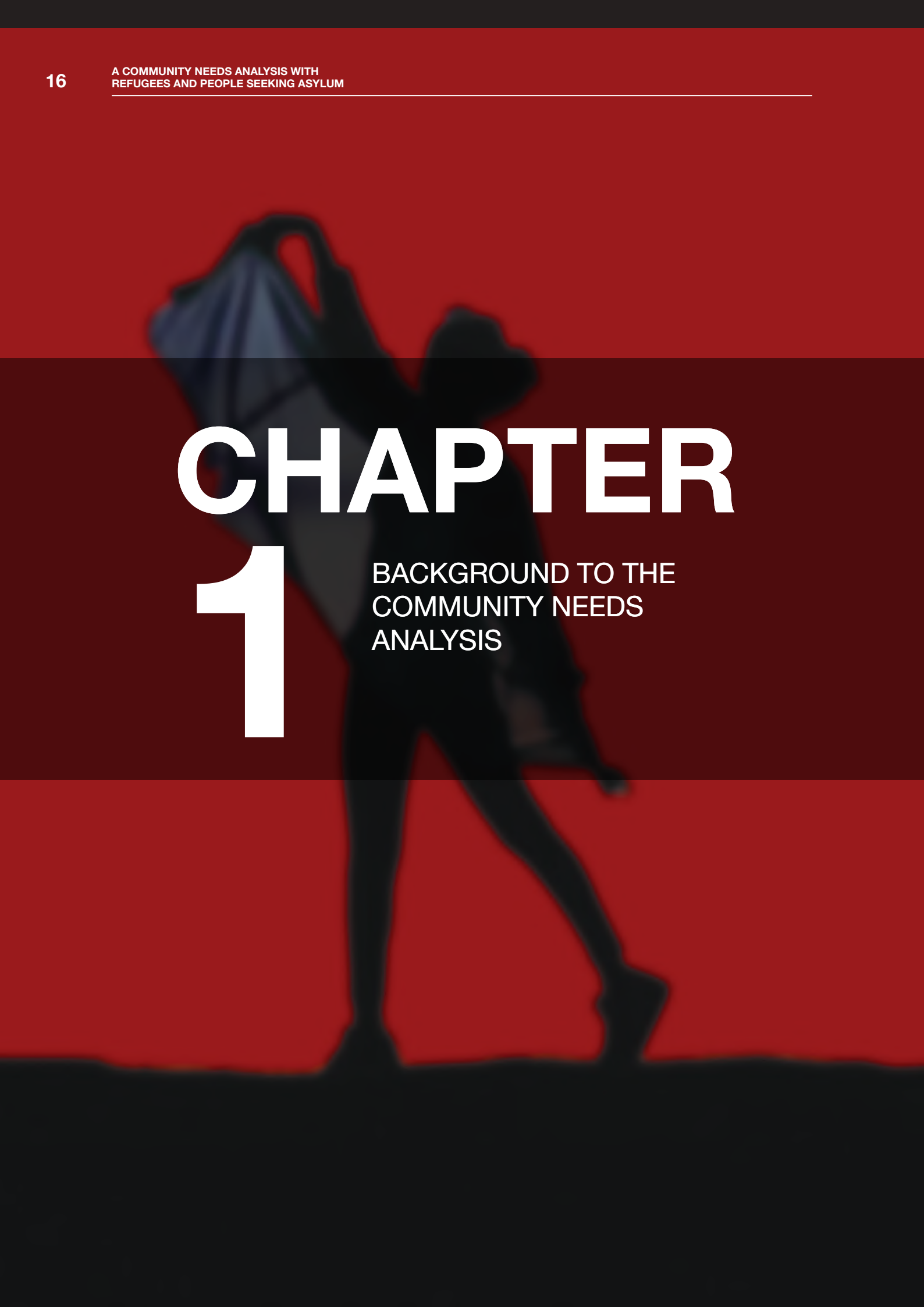
8 Varma, A. (2020). Evoking Empathy or Enacting Solidarity with Marginalized Communities? A Case Study of Journalistic Humanizing Techniques in the San Francisco Homeless Project, *Journalism Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2020.1789495

While Universities of Sanctuary are committed to creating a more welcoming and accessible higher education sector to enable more people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds to reach their full potential and contribute to society,[9] we know that HE students from refugee backgrounds experience a stark divide between the two duelling identities of refugee and university student.[10] Therefore, in this report we urge our higher education institutions to continue to strive for best practice in terms of interrogating privilege and institutional racism, as well as creating more opportunities for refugee voices to be heard, both inside and outside the academy. Finally, while this report is focussed on improving access to higher education in Ireland for refugees and people in the protection process, we recognise that the real issue at play is forced displacement,[11] and our ultimate goal should be absolute freedom so that every person can enjoy access to higher education in their home countries or anywhere else.

9 Speed, F., McCombe, K., Mearns, G. & Chedgzoy, K. (2020). Supporting Sanctuary Students and Staff: Understanding the needs of students and staff from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds. Newcastle University: U.K.

10 Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C. & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling identities in refugees learning through open, online higher education. DCU: Ireland.

11 Ergin, H. (2019). Questioning the ethics and rationale of refugee research. University World News. Available at: https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190930082903163



CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS

1. BACKGROUND TO THE COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS

"Create awareness of asylum seekers, of who they are. It will help remove the prejudice that comes, even with education institutions. Because when you go there, sometimes you may get a chance, if you meet a nice person. But some people are not really aware of who asylum seekers are".

Focus Group Participant

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is a report of a Community Needs Analysis (CNA) carried out by College Connect, with refugees and people seeking asylum (international protection applicants) to explore access and barriers to higher education in partnership with the Irish Refugee Council.

College Connect is a six-year project funded by the HEA under its Programme for Access to Higher Education – PATH 3. Led by Maynooth University (MU), College Connect supports access and widening participation of groups under-represented in higher education in the MEND cluster, covering the Midlands, East, and North Dublin region. The cluster is made up of Dublin City University (DCU), Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), Maynooth University and Technological University of the Shannon, Athlone Campus. The aim of the project is to empower and support non-traditional learners to access higher education (HE).

One of the commitments of College Connect, is that it will carry out a series of peer-to-peer Community Needs Analyses (CNA) to support target groups underrepresented in HE, to explore and address the barriers to access. The first CNA was completed with people with convictions in partnership with the Pathways Centre for Prisoners and Former Prisoners in 2019.[12] The research demonstrated how a combination of Participatory Action Research (PAR), peer-to-peer research, and creative methods, could provide richer and deeper insights to the support needs of this community in improving their access to higher education.[13] Building on the learning from this project, in early 2020, College Connect partnered with the Irish Refugee Council to carry out a second CNA, this time with refugees and people seeking asylum (international protection applicants).

12 Meaney, S. (2019). Community Needs Analysis with the Pathways Centre for Prisoners and Former Prisoners – A pilot study as part of College Connect. Maynooth University: Ireland

13 Ibid p.64

Refugees and international protection applicants are people who have come to Ireland seeking refuge/international protection. They have either been granted refugee protection, 'subsidiary' protection, or permission to remain in Ireland; or are still at various stages of the protection determination process. In this report we refer to 'people seeking asylum', 'international protection applicants', and 'people in the protection process' to encompass what was formally referred to as 'asylum seeker'. Following the International Protection Act 2015, which came into effect in December 2016, 'international protection applicant' is the official term for applicants for refugee status.[14] However, in this research, not one out of 104 respondents self-referred as an 'international protection applicant'. All participants in our research self-referred as 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'. Therefore, for the purpose of accurately representing participant voice, we will continue to incorporate and interchange between the use of 'asylum seeker' or 'person seeking asylum' and 'international protection applicant' or 'person in the protection process'.

The available data for Ireland shows that in 2018 there were 6,041 refugees, and 7,196 international protection applicants/people in the international protection process.[15] By the end of 2020, there were over 5000 pending protection applications lodged in Ireland.[16] The refugee and international protection community in Ireland is a heterogenous community with members from over 50 different countries of the world with varying levels of education and skills sets.[17] Direct Provision was set up by the Irish Government in 2000 to provide for the essential needs of people in the protection application system; food, accommodation, and state provided medical services. As of September 2020, there were 44 Direct Provision Centres nationwide, with a further 36 emergency accommodation locations such as hotels and guest houses, housing approximately 7,400 adults and children.[18] The impact of the system on people's lives has been criticised by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, the Ombudsman and many other Human Rights organisations.[19] In July 2020, the Ombudsman for Children published a report giving children's views and experiences of living in Direct Provision and described the findings as "quite stark".[20] While waiting in limbo for a decision on their application for protection people are banned from taking paid work,[21] without a Labour Market Access Permission,[22] and in effect forced to live in poverty at a remove from the rest of society.[23]

14 http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/66/enacted/en/html
15 UNCHR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) (2019) Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2018. Geneva: UNCHR. Available at https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf.
16 Irish Refugee Council. (2020). Country Report. Asylum Information Database. Ireland: Irish Refugee Council.. [Online] Available at: https://irishrefugeecouncil.eu.rit.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=b8ff096d-8015-4abe-8ad8-55eaffdc4b35
17 https://www.worlddata.info/europe/ireland/asylum.php
18 https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/republic-ireland/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/
19 Government of Ireland. (2020). Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process.
20 Ibid, p.37.
21 The Irish Times. (2018). Direct provision: lives in limbo- Ombudsman's report underlines need for systemic change. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/direct-provision-lives-in-limbo-1.3373946
22 https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/asylum_seekers_and_refugees/services_for_asylum_seekers_in_ireland/direct_provision.html
23 The Irish Times. (2018). Direct provision: lives in limbo- Ombudsman's report underlines need for systemic change. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/direct-provision-lives-in-limbo-1.3373946

Globally, only an alarming 1% of all refugees get into University,[24] and while there is a dearth of statistics in Ireland, there are significant barriers to accessing university education. Participants on this research told us how central they viewed the role of education in rebuilding their lives, yet they also told us how in the 'protection system', one's skill-set, sense of self-worth, and identity are deconstructed. Research indicates that a strategically connected approach to supporting refugees transition into and through HE can impact positively on refugees.[25] Yet, access to higher education is an extremely challenging hurdle for applicants in the international protection system to overcome. Refugees and international protection applicants/asylum seekers, who meet certain criteria are eligible to receive Student Support Grants that aid in offsetting the cost of HE fees, however, the criteria are stringent, and this cohort encounter immense barriers in their bid to access and progress in HE and are consequently underrepresented within the HE system.

Up until August of 2020 people in the protection system were required to pay the international fees charged to non-EU citizens.[26] Criteria have been relaxed since then, which means that those who are in the protection system (excluding those with a deportation order) for a combined period of three years will in future have access rights to further and higher education if they meet the qualifying criteria. However, this still poses a problem for those in international protection who are less than three years in Ireland, thus keeping access to third-level beyond the reach of many.[27]

For example, the Student Grant Scheme, also known as the SUSI grant, is the main financial support scheme for students studying in Ireland and abroad. Students, who are below a certain household income threshold, can qualify to have their tuition fees paid as well as a small maintenance grant, to support their third-level education. For academic year 2020/21, over 100,900 applications were received by SUSI and over 79,200 students awarded funding.[28] However, the current nationality criteria for student grant purposes, require a student to be an Irish national or a national of the EU/EEA, UK, or Swiss Federation national. These criteria preclude many students from migrant or refugee backgrounds, and particularly impact on young people who may have completed their final school exam the Leaving Certificate, only to be denied the opportunity to go to college.[29] Even for refugees who have been granted a 'Stamp 4', which is a residency permission that allows people to live and work in Ireland, it does not allow holders access to SUSI grants.[30]

24 Refugeesupportnetwork.org. 2020. Access To Higher Education | Refugee Support Network. [Online] Available at: https://www.refugeesupportnetwork.org/pages/25-access-to-higher-education.
25 Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C. & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling identities in refugees learning through open, online higher education [online]. *Open Praxis*. Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 397-408.
26 Government of Ireland. (2020). Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process.
27 Ibid
28 https://susi.ie/about-us/
29 Conneely, A. (2021). Govt urged to widen access to student grants for refugees, migrants. RTE. Available at: https://www.rte.ie/news/2021/0825/1242768-student-grant-refugees/
30 Ibid

College Connect is committed to equality and community consultation, and this research is based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) principals, that encompass equitable participation of researchers with community members and a commitment to collaboratively address action or social transformation.[31] This holds specific meaning about how we position ourselves reflectively in relation to research. How we know our worlds, and whether that is being interpreted by a researcher or participant, can bring tensions between knowing and researching issues to the fore in a really useful way.[32] Personal accounts, for example, are not the same as subjective accounts, yet a wide range of researchers in various disciplines stress the value of this and personal accounts of lived experience are now being formally used by policymakers in group consultations.[33]

Peer-researchers are an essential 'bridge', capable of linking hard-to-reach populations with the academy in positive, productive community–university partnerships.[34] Perhaps the most challenging issue in this type of research is the considerable investment that is required in terms of time and resources. Nevertheless, we believe it is justified by the increased understanding we gain through meaningful and ethical engagement and explicitly recognising participants as the experts in their own experience.

1.2 THE IRISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

The Irish Refugee Council (IRC) provide services and support for people recognised as refugees in Ireland, as well as advocating for humane and dignified protection procedures and responses to people fleeing persecution. The IRC has its origins in a 1988 Conference held in Dublin, themed 'Refugees in Crisis' and formally crystalised into a group afterwards in 1992. The IRC has been extremely active in its provision of legal support and advice to international protection applicants and refugees, as although Ireland signed the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1956, the country had no system for those who sought international protection here until the Refugee Act of 1996 was implemented in 2000. The Act reflected the increase in asylum applications from the 1990's onwards in Ireland and heralded the beginning of the enactment of policies that make life incredibly difficult for refugees arriving in the country.[35] Pioneers of providing early legal advice, through witnessing time and again how peoples' outcomes were improved with early legal intervention and support, the services of the IRC are perhaps in more demand than ever as the world experiences the worst refugee crisis in nearly 20 years as Europe closes its borders even more tightly.[36]

31 Bergold, J. & Thomas, S. (2012). Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion. Qualitative Social Research, [S.l.], Vol. 13, No. 1. Retrieved from: http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1801/3334

32 Grummell, B. Email to author, July 7th, 2021.

33 Finnegan, F. Email to author, July 7th, 2021

34 O'Reilly-de Brún, M., de Brún, T., Okonkwo, E. et al. Using Participatory Learning & Action research to access and engage with hard to reach migrants in primary healthcare research. BMC Health Serv Res 16, 25 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-015-1247-8

35 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). "Chapter 12 Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland". In Refugees and Higher Education. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012

36 https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/our-history-1

> ***"It's been proven time and time again, that if you can give somebody good legal advice at the beginning of the process, their outcomes are much better than if you get involved with the legal process further down the line".***
>
> Interview with Irish Refugee Council

Since 2015, the IRC has expanded its focus to education, in recognition of the vital role education plays in people's development, self-esteem, and integration, as well as being an 'investment in our future, in our country and in our progress'.[37] Reliant entirely in the beginning from philanthropic donations and support from the Community Foundation for Ireland, the IRC provides information support to hundreds of refugees annually and currently support about 60 refugees annually to access education in Ireland through financial supports and a further 60 through advocacy supports. As such the IRC education work broadens access to HE for people in the protection process through;

- Providing grants to students allowing them to enter education.
- Supporting the development of scholarships and other opportunities in universities, institutes of technology and colleges.
- Undertaking individual advocacy and casework on behalf of students.

So, in early 2020, when the Irish Refugee Council approached College Connect to see if there was scope to carry out a CNA with refugees and people seeking asylum around access to HE, the proposal seemed to afford College Connect the opportunity to engage meaningfully with one of the most hard-to-reach communities. The HEA National Plan for Equity of Access to HE,[38] states that access to HE should be available to all individuals, yet the prospects for refugees appear to be disproportionately constrained by both the judicial system with regards to status, and the conditions for eligibility for education supports.[39]

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The broad aim of the CNA was to explore both the barriers and the supports that exist within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for refugees and people in the protection process, and to see what could be put in place to better support this cohort to progress to and through college and university. The study aimed to explore peoples' experiences to gather their views and insights on the factors that may either encourage or discourage participation or progression in HE. With these aims in mind, the CNA explored the following questions with participants:

37 https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/listing/category/education
38 Higher Education Authority. (2015). *National plan for equity of access to higher education 2015-2019*. Higher Education Authority.
39 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). "Chapter 12 Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland". In Refugees and Higher Education. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012

1. What is your experience of trying to access higher education in Ireland?
2. What made a positive difference (or supported) that process?
3. What got in the way of that process?
4. What would improve higher education access for you and others?

The CNA adopted a participative and experiential approach to this research process, to encourage collaborative leadership and development of the project at all stages. A peer-research team was recruited in line with this approach. The team participated in and reviewed the focus group process before facilitating discussions with participants. As part of the research process, members of the research team also contributed to discussions on strategy and engaged in other initiatives that emerged as offshoots of this research.

Key themes emerged from this research which run throughout the report and form important framing concepts. The intersectional and multiple nature of barriers faced by non-traditional students in education is widely recognised in the literature and is evident throughout this report, for example; childcare and financial constraints. Themes which are more particular to the experiences of this cohort include poverty, non-recognition of prior learning, ineligible immigration stamps, location and transport between Direct Provision centres and colleges, lack of information and being quoted international fees.

1.4 LAYOUT AND STRUCTURE OF REPORT

This report sets out the findings from the 40 in-depth interviews and 104 survey responses collected over the period from October 2020 – March 2021 with refugees and people in the protection process in Ireland around their experience of accessing or trying to access HE. Using a peer-to-peer participatory approach and Photovoice as a methodology, this study aims to capture the lived experience of refugees and people seeking asylum in accessing HE in Ireland. The report also features transcript poems, that were created by Dr. Sarah Meaney Sartori from participants' interview transcripts, and re-worked by spoken word artist Felicia Olusanya, aka Felispeaks. These are peppered throughout the report and capture the themes of; loss of identity and self-worth in the protection system – 'Deconstructed'; poverty for people in receipt of an allowance while in Direct Provision – 'That 19 Euro?'; the barriers and challenges for refugees that serve to impede entry to and progression through education – 'Delayed Futures'.

In recognition that there is little research in the Irish context focused on the experiences of refugees and people in the protection process in the higher education system,[40] this report puts participant voice and experience front and centre in an attempt to redress the balance. As such, this report offers a new perspective on the topic of HE access for refugees and people seeking asylum in Ireland, rooted in participants' experiences and narratives, and substantiated with data from our survey, as well as with interviews with stakeholders with expertise in the area of educational supports for this cohort.

40 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). "Chapter 12 Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland". In Refugees and Higher Education. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012

This report will be presented in nine chapters;

- **Chapter One** introduces the report and sets the context.
- **Chapter Two** describes the international protection system in Ireland and lays out the different legal terms in relation to refugees and international protection applicants in Ireland, that will subsequently be referenced throughout the rest of the report.
- **Chapter Three** sets out the methodological approach to the CNA. It describes how participants were recruited; the different methods used to collect data.
- **Chapter Four** lays out the demographics of participants in the study.
- **Chapter Five** focuses on the barriers to higher education access highlighted by participants and situates these responses amongst the literature.
- **Chapter Six** presents the supports which participants put forward as making a positive difference in their access to education.
- **Chapter Seven** lays out recommendations from participants, substantiated with the literature and with recommendations from staff working in relevant sectors.
- **Chapter Eight** discusses the public engagement aspect of this research through the arts and the use of arts-based methodologies and tries to predict 'where next?' in relation to how to progress and address some of the issues discussed and presented.
- **Chapter Nine** contains the closing remarks to this report.

A participatory action research project, such as this, is of itself a form of action and activism. Therefore, we view the publication of this research report not as an ending, but rather as a beginning to help us point to the direction of our next steps to action the needs of refugees and international protection applicants to facilitate easier access and progression to and through higher education in Ireland.

THAT 19 EURO?

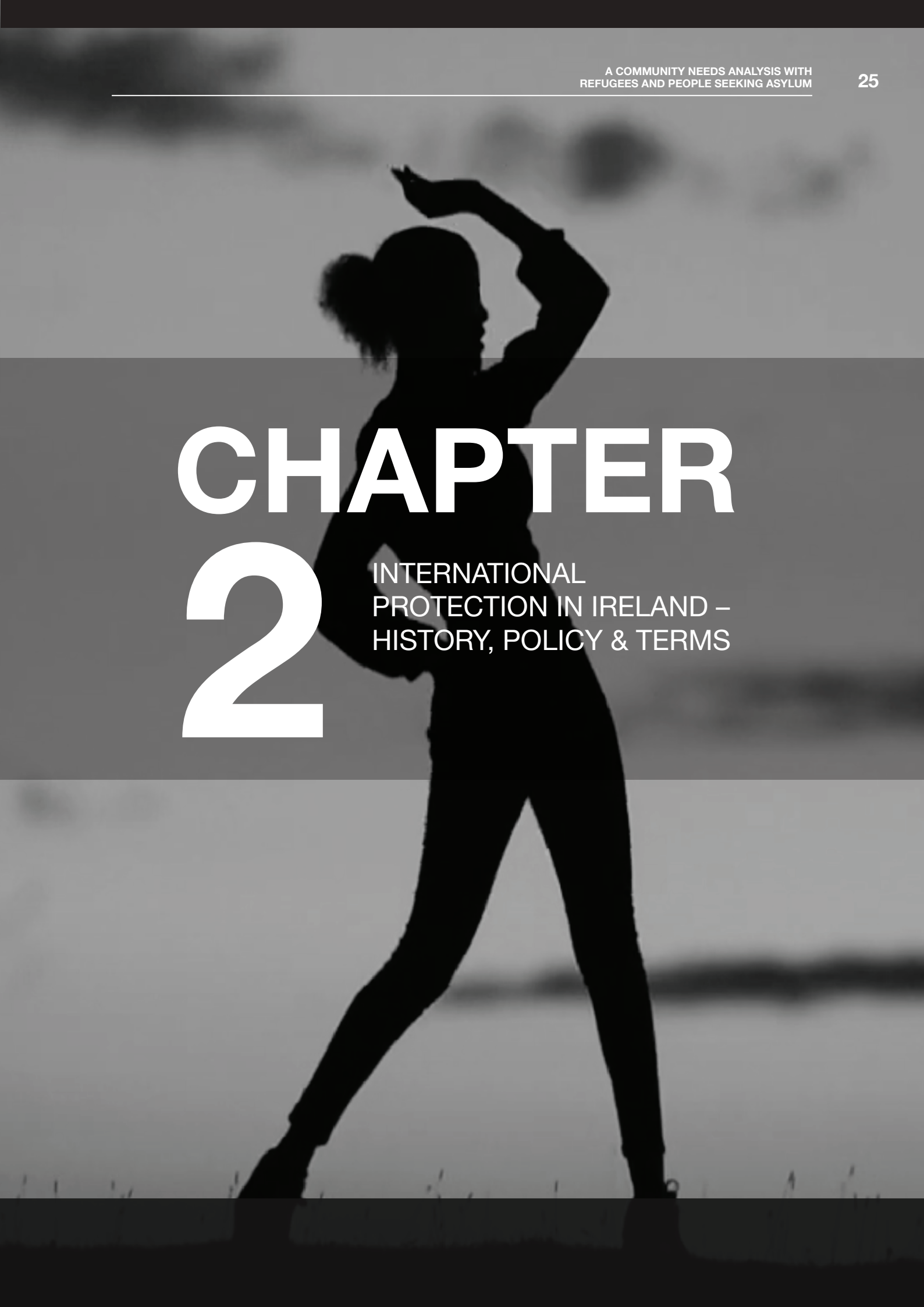
‘You know, we’re not open at that time you might have to jump over the gate’ she said,
Like an obstacle course, like a jungle gym playground, like there’s treasure on the other side
She didn’t see the cage doors bolted, the sentence without the crime So, I climbed

‘You’re actually being fed’ But I’ll be hungry all-day
But I have climbed the cage to find common ground in a school Too early to pick the crumbs off the table, too early to swallow leftovers, too early to pick skin of oatmeal
So, I starved

‘You get money’ That 19 euro?
The one looking to be rounded off for pennies in my sheets that drown in small coffee cups? And a sandwich when a sandwich can be carried
That 19 euro?
That splits in a day that can’t stitch the holes in my pocket ‘You’re getting enough’

We used to teach children to assemble bikes to put together their own dreams We showed them how to whizz down any path they wanted
Even when death tried to take a chance on me I rode and so,
I live

Poem by Felicia Olusanya AKA Felispeaks in response to transcript poetry.



CHAPTER 2

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN IRELAND – HISTORY, POLICY & TERMS

2. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN IRELAND – HISTORY, POLICY & TERMS

"Just because I was born over there, someone else was born over here, I happen to look different… this informs the society in a certain way, and they tend to develop certain ideas. That there should be segregation, certain people should have certain access to certain things, and then therefore, that informs policy in the making and that informs law in the making"

Focus Group Participant

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe the background and context to international protection and define the various terms ascribed to refugees and people seeking asylum in Ireland, that have a direct bearing on the limitations placed on access to higher education. We have attempted to lay this chapter out as a glossary, and it is our intention that readers going through the report will be able to refer to it for specific information if and when required.

In terms of higher education access and widening participation policy, we speak about 'clear and coherent pathways', 'entry routes', 'targeted supports' and 'equity of access'.[41] The legal, historical and policy complexities described in this chapter, coupled with a failure to clarify the rights to higher education for refugees or the duties of the State in this regard,[42] combine to create a highly convoluted maze that would be challenging for anyone to navigate. The negotiation of dense bureaucratic systems and the sociocultural context, where informal learning for refugees and people seeking asylum takes place over a number of years,[43] we believe needs to be recognised and extolled in recognition of prior learning policy (RPL), for the remarkable achievement it is.

41 HEA. National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019. Available at: https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Plan-for-Equity-of-Access-to-Higher-Education-2015-2019.pdf

42 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.

43 Sheridan, V.. (2021). Counter stories: life experiences of refugee background mature students in higher education in Ireland. Race Ethnicity and Education. 1-18. 10.1080/13613324.2021.1890559

2.2 A BRIEF TIMELINE TO INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

International protection refers to 'the actions by the international community on the basis of international law, aimed at protecting the fundamental rights of a specific category of persons outside their countries of origin, who lack the national protection of their own countries'.[44]

International protection is not a new phenomenon. For centuries, as early as biblical times, nations have granted protection to people fleeing their homes as a result of persecution or conflict.[45] Modern refugee laws however only came to light after the 2nd world war.[46] The build-up to the war and the war itself, created an unprecedented refugee crisis that signalled a need for legal instruments to be put in place to protect the rights and dignity of those who were fleeing persecution. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly. This declaration sets out basic rights and freedoms that should be applicable to all human beings. Article 14 of the Declaration provides that:

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Subsequent instruments and laws relating to the rights of displaced people as well as international protection, have built on the foundation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[47]

In the last 20 years, with the increase in wars and internal conflicts in nations of the world, displacement has doubled.[48] [49] At the end of 2020, there were 82.4 million forcibly displaced people globally - people that had been forced to flee their homes as a result of conflict or persecution.[50]

44 European Commission. (2020, November 9). Retrieved from European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/international-protection_en

45 A story in Genesis 16 is told of Hagar who was ill treated by her mistress Sarah and who had to flee out of fear for her life. Even though she eventually returned, the act of fleeing for her life is in keeping with the reasons why thousands of people flee their countries today. The Exodus of Israel from Egypt is also a form of mass migration. Also in Matthew 2, the story is told of Jesus Mary and Joseph fleeing for their lives after Herod the king had ordered the death of the child, Jesus. It is narrated that the family sought asylum in Egypt.

46 International Justice Research Centre. (2020, January 20). Asylum and the Rights of Refugees. Retrieved November 09, 2020, from International Justice Research Centre: https://ijrcenter.org/refugee-law/

47 Ibid

48 UNHCR. (2020, June 18). About Us: Figures at a Glance. Retrieved November 09, 2020, from UNHCR Ireland: https://www.unhcr.org/en-ie/figures-at-a-glance.html

49 Arnold, S., Ryan, C., & Quinn, E. (2018). Ireland's response to recent trends in the International Protection Applicants. Economic and Social Research Institute.

50 UNHCR. (2021). https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/

This figure has been on a steady rise in the last five years and has increased by more than 10 million since 2018.[51] Of this figure, it is reported that 26 million are refugees and 4.2 million are seeking asylum in various nations of the world.[52] It is obvious, going by the reported figures, that now more than ever the refugee phenomenon requires a global and concerted effort at resolution.[53]

2.3 THE 1951 CONVENTION RELATING TO THE STATUS OF REFUGEES

In 1951, the United Nations General Assembly in response to the refugee crisis, as well as in a bid to bring some global cohesiveness and uniformity to the treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum, approved a multilateral treaty called The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, or the Refugee Convention. The convention set out the definition of a refugee as well as standards for the treatment of those who fulfil the criteria. The international community adopted a protocol to the convention which removed geographical limitations that were contained in the original document. This Convention is significant as it was the first document to codify the rights, obligations and duties of refugees and their host countries. It has been hailed as the foundation of modern International Refugee Law.[54] Despite its seeming comprehensiveness, the 1951 convention is silent on the procedures host countries may use to actually ascertain if those seeking protection are eligible to be granted refugee status under the provisions of the instrument. This is left to the laws of individual nations. 194 nations have signed as parties to the convention, and 195 nations as parties to the protocol. Ireland acceded to the Convention in 1956. Once a country accedes to a United Nation Protocol, the contents of the protocol automatically become binding on that country.

2.4 IRELAND'S INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

The Irish are a people who are not unaccustomed to mass emigration. Between 1841 and 1851 for instance, it is reported that over one million Irish people emigrated to the United States to escape the harsh effects of the Irish famine.[55] This is not the only instance of mass emigration in Ireland's history. Between the 1950s and the late 1990s, the weak economy of the country caused another era of mass emigration.

51 UNHCR. (2020, June 18). About Us: Figures at a Glance. Retrieved November 09, 2020, from UNHCR Ireland.
52 Ibid
53 United Nations. (2016, September 19). Press: Meeting Coverage. Retrieved November 09, 2020, from United Nations Web Site: https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/ga11820.doc.htm
54 UNHCR. (2005, August 1). An Introduction to International Protection. Retrieved from UNHCR Website: https://www.unhcr.org/3ae6bd5a0.pdf#:~:text=International%20protection.%20International%20protection%20can%20be%20defined%20as,%28including%20international%20humanitarian%2C%20human%20rights%20and%20refugee%20law%29.
55 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.

It was not until the government and economic reforms as well as the associated economic boom, that Ireland began to have its own taste of inward migration. It is reported that by 1996 Ireland ceased to be a nation of outward migration.[56] [57]

For a nation so accustomed to its own fair share of emigration, Ireland's reaction to and relationship with migrants coming into its borders over the years, has, however, not always been positive. Ireland displayed reluctance in accepting Jewish refugees during the 2nd World War.[58] A few years later, in the late 1950s, Ireland admirably took in Hungarian refugees that fled the communist suppression in Budapest. It is, however, reported that the refugees were more or less quarantined and housed in centres with abysmal living conditions.[59] Even though the numbers of people coming into the country seeking protection have continued to increase, the same concerns and issues raised by the Hungarian refugees in 1956, [60] appear to continue today.[61]

Between April 2019 and April 2020, 85,000 new immigrants came into the Irish state for varying reasons.[62] Even though this was a 3.6% decrease from the previous year, the figures are still comparatively high to what Ireland had known previously. Ireland currently has a total of 644,400 migrants within its borders, accounting for 12.9% of the total population.[63] While all refugees are migrants, not all people migrating to Ireland are refugees or people seeking international protection. A large percentage of migrants are economic migrants who have migrated to Ireland to take up employment, educational migrants who have come into the country to undertake educational programmes, or people who are seeking long term residency as their family members now reside in Ireland. Refugees are distinct from other migrants because of the particular circumstances that compel them to flee their countries. The issues raised in this report will focus on migrants who have entered into the country to seek international protection as well as those with refugee status.

2.5 THE INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION ACT 2015

The International Protection Act 2015 was signed into law by the President in December 2015 but only commenced operation on 31 December 2016. It is the main piece of legislation that regulates the application for and the granting of international protection by the Irish State. This Act repealed the Refugee Act of 1996. One of the main features of this legislation is that it introduced a single procedure for applications for international protection.

56 Ibid
57 Bielenberg, A. (2013). The Irish Diaspora. Routledge.
58 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.
59 Maguire, M. (2004). On the other side of the hyphen: Vietnamese Irish identity. P.25. UIM PhD Thesis.
60 The Irish Times (2010). APRIL 30th, 1957: Hungarian refugees 'left to rust' go on hunger strike. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/april-30th-1957-hungarian-refugees-left-to-rust-go-on-hunger-strike-1.643156
61 RTE (2021). Shining a light on 'appalling' Direct Provision system. Available at: https://www.rte.ie/news/regional/2021/0807/1239597-galway-direct-provision/
62 CSO. (2020, August 20). Statistics: Population and Migration Estimates. Retrieved from Central Statistics Office Web site: https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2020
63 CSO (2021). Available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2021pressreleases/pressstatementpopulationandmigrationestimatesapril2021/

Under the single procedure, an applicant will make only one application for examination and determination of eligibility for international protection (refugee or subsidiary protection) and permission to remain. All grounds will be determined in one process. Also, of significance is a terminology change. Whereas the previous Act referred to a person who was 'seeking asylum', the 2015 Act uses the term 'international protection' and 'applicant'.

2.5.1 PROTECTION APPLICANT (PREVIOUSLY ASYLUM SEEKER)

Section 2(1) of the IPA 2015 defines a protection applicant as a person who has made an application for international protection and who seeks to be recognised as a refugee. Up until recently, protection applicants (asylum seekers) were not eligible to work in Ireland. A 2017 Supreme Court decision however, ruled that an indefinite ban on permission to work for international protection applicants was unconstitutional. Consequently, international protection applicants who have stayed in Ireland for six months or more, are now eligible to work.

In August 2020, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) relaxed previous restrictive criteria for accessing the Student Support Scheme grants for HE by removing the need for international protection applicants to have either sat the Leaving Certificate exam or have spent not less than three years within the Irish secondary school system.[64] The Student Support Scheme provides grants, in line with the current Student Grant Scheme (SUSI Student Universal Support Ireland), to eligible school leavers who are in the international protection system (except those at the deportation order stage) and who are either;

- asylum applicants
- subsidiary protection applicants
- leave to remain applicants[65]

Currently, international protection applicants (asylum seekers) who have been in the country for a minimum of three years are eligible to apply for the support grants. Prior to 2019, the reckonable residence requirement for accessing the scheme was five years but in 2019, the time frame was reduced from five years to three years. It is, however, this recent removal of the requirement of having Irish secondary school experience that has substantially eased the burden of a large number of protection applicants, by determining them now as being eligible for this scheme.[66]

64 Kelly, E. (2019, June 4). News: Criteria eased for asylum seekers to attend third level. Retrieved from RTE Web site: https://www.rte.ie/news/education/2019/0604/1053485-education-asylum-seekers/

65 https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/9a323-continuation-and-expansion-of-student-support-scheme-for-asylum-seekers-in-the-international-protection-system-announced-by-minister-harris/

66 Kelly, E. (2019, June 4). News: Criteria eased for asylum seekers to attend third level. Retrieved from RTE Web site: https://www.rte.ie/news/education/2019/0604/1053485-education-asylum-seekers/

2.5.2 REFUGEE

The Act provides that a refugee is a person…

> ***who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside his or her country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.***
>
> (Section 2(1) IPA 2015)

Some people are refugees who fulfil the requirements of the definition of refugee as defined in the IPA 2015 (above) and have been granted refugee status. They are people who came into Ireland seeking asylum and who were subsequently granted refugee status. Such a person must;

1. Be unwilling to avail himself of protection in his country, or
2. Be outside their country of habitual residence and unwilling to return to that country because they fear persecution (Stateless person).

The persecution feared must be for one of these reasons:

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Political opinion
- Membership of a particular social group

These refugees, who were previously known as 'convention refugees', can avail of similar rights as those of an Irish citizen. They can also reside in the country and then apply to become Irish citizens after three years of continuous residence as refugees.

Resettled refugees are people who have been invited to Ireland, usually as a result of a Government decision in relation to a humanitarian request usually by the UNHCR, and through a process of resettlement. The Irish Refugee Protection Programme was set up in 2015, as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa, with the understanding that Ireland will receive 4000 displaced people through a process of relocation and resettlement.[67]

67 http://www.integration.ie/en/isec/pages/irpp

Refugee resettlement involves the transfer of people who have already been granted refugee status in one country, to a third state that has accepted to admit them in as refugees. Under the auspices of UNHCR and on the vehicle of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, Ireland has resettled 1913 refugees in the last five years. Resettled refugees, unlike other international protection applicants or people seeking asylum, come into the country with automatically granted refugee status and residency permissions.

People who participate in refugee resettlement are known also as 'programme refugees'. Programme refugees have been resettled to 29 different communities across Ireland to date, and the literature around these people is almost always silent or thin.[68] Some writers are of the opinion that programme refugees are treated better and are more 'fortunate' than other protection applicants and refugees.[69] While this assertion may look true through the eyes of someone who has spent years in Direct Provision system, it may not be an accurate representation. Research we do have has shown that by the very nature of why they have come into the country, programme refugees are significantly more vulnerable to poor mental health as well as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of the traumas they have witnessed and encountered.[70]

2.5.3 RELOCATION

Relocation involves transferring international protection applicants (people seeking asylum) from one EU Nation (e.g., Greece or Italy) to another; in the case of Ireland, to Ireland. Even though Ireland pledged to relocate 2622 people seeking asylum in 2015, by the end of 2019, it was only able to accept 1022 people through the relocation strand.[71] When people seeking asylum are relocated to Ireland, they do not have automatic refugee status. They must present under Section 13 of the IPA 2015 and apply for international protection. Their application is then assessed under Irish domestic law. They are however subject to an expedited procedure and their applications are determined within three months of arrival in the state.[72]

Under the IPA 2015, where an international protection applicant (asylum seeker) does not meet the requirements for being deemed a refugee, such an applicant may still be granted subsidiary protection, especially where there are substantial grounds to believe that the person will be in danger of suffering serious harm in their home country. This person may apply for refugee status and subsidiary protection at the same time under the IPA single procedure. The application for subsidiary protection will be reviewed immediately if that of asylum or refugee status is refused. People granted subsidiary protection are granted a lot of rights that are akin to citizenship rights.[73]

68 Citizenship Information. (2017, January 12). Home: Moving Country - Rights conferred on people granted refugee or subsidiary protection status or permission to remain. Retrieved from Citizenship Information: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/asylum_seekers_and_refugees/refugee_status_and_leave_to_remain/rights_of_convention_programme_refugees_people_given_leave_to_remain.html

69 Pestova, N. (2017, February). Differential Treatment of Refugees in Ireland. Forced Migration, 54.

70 Watters, C., Mowlds, W., & Sarma, K. (2020). The Experiences of Living in an Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre in Ireland - A Qualitative Study. *Clinical Psychology Today*.

71 http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Irish_Refugee_Protection_Programme_(IRPP)

72 IPO; UNHCR. (2017, February 27). Prioritisation of Applications for International Protection under the International Protection Act 2015. Retrieved from International Protection Office Web Site: http://bit.ly/2m1Plbi.

73 Citizenship Information. (2017, January 12). Home: Moving Country - Rights conferred on people granted refugee or subsidiary protection status or permission to remain. Retrieved from Citizenship Information: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/asylum_seekers_and_refugees/refugee_status_and_leave_to_remain/rights_of_convention_programme_refugees_people_given_leave_to_remain.html

Where a person's application for refugee status and subsidiary protection is refused, the state may, taking consideration of family, personal and humanitarian circumstances as well as other matters, grant the applicant permission to remain in the state. A permission to remain in the state again carries with it a number of rights that are akin to those of Irish citizens. People grated permission to remain do not, however, have the automatic right of family reunification even though they can apply for this to the Minister. A grant or denial of this application is on 'strictly discretionary grounds'.[74]

2.5.4 EMERGENCY RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION CENTRES (EROCS)

After the Irish Government undertook to accept refugees under the relocation and resettlement schemes of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, it opened three centres in 2016 to accommodate the refugees and people seeking asylum that were coming in through the scheme. Three centres were opened in 2016 in counties Kildare, Roscommon, and Waterford.[75] Mosney, a former family holiday park and now a Direct Provision centre in County Louth, is also used as an EROC. Residents in EROC are either routed through the Balseskin Reception Centre or are taken there within the shortest possible time for medical screening and proper registration.

Once applicants indicate their intention to seek protection in Ireland, they are taken to a central reception centre close to the Dublin Airport in a place call Balseskin. The Balseskin Reception Centre is a 487- bed centre that serves as a central hub for all protection applicants upon their arrival. The Balseskin Reception Centre was designed to be a temporary accommodation where applicants would be supported and assigned to Direct Provision centres, pending the outcome of their applications. A previous occupant has described the rooms within the centre as being 'big enough for one but accommodating three'.[76] Aside from issues of overcrowding, there have been complaints of inappropriate pairing with strangers in rooms (and bathrooms) and a scarcity of relevant information. One Syrian person seeking asylum, referred to the centre as a 'camp'.[77] Even though the Balseskin Reception Centre has been designated a temporary hub, protection applicants have stayed there for as long as six months before being 'dispatched' to their Direct Provision centres.[78] At the Balseskin centre, applicants are granted access to medical screening and counselling services.

Sometime in September 2018, the Balseskin Reception Centre reached capacity and protection applicants coming into Ireland were rendered homeless upon arrival.[79] Sometimes, when there is a space constraint, applicants are transferred directly to emergency centres.

74 http://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/permissiontoremain
75 Department of Justice. (2017, January 26). Media&Publications : Resources and services for the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre in Ballaghaderreen. Retrieved from Department of Justice Website: http://justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/SP17000022
76 Mfaco, B. (2019). Towards a more humane assylum process. MASI Conference. Dublin: MASI. Retrieved from MASI: https://www.masi.ie/2019/10/09/towards-a-more-humane-asylum-process-keynote-speech-by-bulelani-mfaco/
77 Hogan, C. (2013, Autumn). Article: The Cruel Limbo of 'direct provision'. Retrieved from the Dublin Review: https://thedublinreview.com/article/the-cruel-limbo-of-direct-provision/
78 Ibid
79 Irish Refugee Council. (2019). Asylum in Europe Database: Country Report Ireland. Retrieved from AIDA: http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/republic-ireland/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation

The implication of this is that such applicants are unable to avail of the medical and counselling services provided for in the Balseskin Centre.[80] From Balseskin, applicants are randomly allocated Direct Provision centres. Applicants do not have a say as to where they are transferred. In 2018, Ireland became a party to the Reception Conditions Regulation,[81] which mandate member states to perform 'vulnerability assessments' prior to deciding which Direct Provision centre is suitable for applicants. It has however taken Ireland three years and some High Court challenges to implement these assessments.

2.5.5 DIRECT PROVISION

Ireland's reception system for asylum seekers is known as Direct Provision. Under the Direct Provision system, people are accommodated across the country in communal institutional centres or former hotel style settings. The vast majority of the centres are managed on a for-profit basis by private contractors. Direct Provision is intended to provide for the basic needs of people who are awaiting decisions on their applications for international protection. The system was designed as a short-term measure in the year 2000, but many applicants experience lengthy stays, which is associated with declining physical and mental health, self-esteem and skills. Today, there are more than 7,000 people living in Direct Provision centres across Ireland, 30% of whom are children.[82]

The direct provision allowance was introduced in 2000 at the weekly rate of IR£15 (€19.10) per adult and IR£7.50 (€9.60) per child.[83] In 2019, this was increased and adults living in asylum centres across the State began to receive a daily expenses allowance of €38.80 per week while children began to receive €29.80.[84] To put this in context, in 2021, any adult without dependents below €286.48 as a minimum weekly disposable income (after taxes and including all benefits) is counted as being at risk of poverty.[85]

In Direct Provision, food is generally provided in the form of three served canteen-style meals a day at set times. Limited cooking facilities are available in a small number of centres. Complaints have been made regarding the lack of variety and lack of nutritional options in the centres. As recently as February of this year, residents at Ashbourne House Direct Provision centre in Cork started boycotting meals, threatening to escalate to a full hunger strike, saying the food is not nutritious enough for children, who only receive one piece of fruit per day.[86]

80 Ibid
81 http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/si/230/made/en/print
82 http://doras.org/direct-provision/
83 Pollack, S. (2019). Asylum seeker weekly allowance rises for adults and children. The Irish Times. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/asylum-seeker-weekly-allowance-rises-for-adults-and-children-1.3837061
84 Ibid
85 Central Statistics Office (2021) Labour Market Insights Bulletin, Series 5 Q4 2020. Dublin: Stationery Office.
86 Pollack, S. (2021). Cork direct provision residents refuse meals over 'low standard'. The Irish Times. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/cork-direct-provision-residents-refuse-meals-over-low-standard-1.4488868

Direct Provision centres operate a stringent environment at mealtimes and display a lack of awareness from service providers regarding the delivery of culturally appropriate food that meets residents' nutritional needs, or their cultural-religious requirements, as well as special dietary and medical needs.[87]

2.6 RECENT POLICY CHANGES & ACTIVITY -THE CATHERINE DAY REPORT & THE WHITE PAPER

Since the commencement of this research, which began in 2020, the Government has released two policy reports on issues that relate to the research topic. We will describe these reports briefly in this section.

Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process[88]

An advisory group, chaired by former Secretary General of the European Commission, Catherine Day, submitted a report recommending sweeping changes to the current protection process. The report recommended reducing the amount of time spent in Direct Provision centres, providing own door accommodation to people in the protection process, and abolishing the current Direct Provision system by 2023 amongst other recommendations.

A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Service[89]

Even though the Catherine Day report was non-binding, it informed the Government's White Paper on the issue of Direct Provision. In February 2021, the Government published a White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Service.[90] In the White Paper, the Government sets out a two-phase plan to bring the current Direct Provision system to an end, and to set up a new and more humane system centred on a human rights approach. International protection applicants will be entitled to own-door accommodation in any county, and will be allowed to access the labour market within four months of their entry into the country. Of particular relevance to this research is the fact that The White Paper provides that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth will facilitate eligible third-level students to be accommodated in locations convenient to their higher education institutions, where possible. While this is a very welcome development, the three-year eligibility requirement for accessing support grants still remains.

87 Barry, K. (2014). What's Food Got To Do With It: Food Experiences of Asylum Seekers in Direct Provision. Ireland: NASC The Irish Immigrant Support Centre.

88 Government of Ireland. (2020). Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/634ad-report-of-the-advisory-group-on-the-provision-ofsupport-including-accommodation-to-persons-in-the-international-protection-process/

89 Government of Ireland. (2021). A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a NewInternational Protection Support Service. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7aad0-minister-ogorman-publishes-the-white-paper-on-ending-direct-provision/

90 Ibid

2.7 REFUGEES AND PEOPLE SEEKING PROTECTION - ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND

The stratification of social rights in terms of 'citizens' and 'non-citizens' effectively places 'non-citizens' in status limbo, which has far-reaching consequences in terms of access to higher education, the right of access to which is not provided for specifically in Irish Constitutional Law.[91] Research shows that refugees and international protection applicants/people seeking asylum, worldwide face enormous financial, legal, and other practical constraints in their bid to access higher education.[92] The story in Ireland is not any different. Indeed, one study showed that the inability by asylum seekers in Ireland to access higher education is one of the most often mentioned frustrations encountered by those living in Direct Provision.[93]

Prior to 2015 in Ireland, some refugees and people in the protection process could only access higher education in Ireland if they could pay international fees, typically ranging from €9,900 per year up to €34,000 depending on the course, level of study and length of the programme.[94] While refugees who have lived in Ireland for over three years are eligible for free fees at undergraduate level and SUSI supports, people seeking asylum/protection are subject to non-EU fees in most institutions, regardless of length of time spent in Ireland, and are not eligible for SUSI support. In September 2015, the Student Support Scheme was introduced by the Government in an attempt to ameliorate the prohibitory impact of requesting international fees from refugees. To be eligible, students needed to meet certain requirements including accessing the Irish educational system for a period of five consecutive years. The criteria for accessing the scheme were so restrictive that only six students were able to avail of the support grant in the first four years of its existence. In 2019, by an amendment to the scheme, the eligibility criteria were eased and reviewed downwards to three years of continuous education, as referenced earlier in this chapter. While this was a welcome development, it meant that mature students who had not attended second level education in Ireland were caught out by the policy and therefore still obliged to pay international fees if they wanted to access HE. In 2020, the scheme was revised yet again, this time to allow access to all refugees and people seeking asylum who had been resident in the state for three years or more and who were not subject to a deportation order.

Prior to this report being published, a participant in this research who is a resettled refugee, applied to study at post-graduate level within one of the participating MEND HEIs supporting this study.

91 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.

92 Refugee Support Network (2012). "I just want to study": Access to Higher Education for Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Available at: https://www.refugeesupportnetwork.org/resources/13-i-just-want-to-study-access-to-higher-education-for-young-refugees-and-asylum-seekers

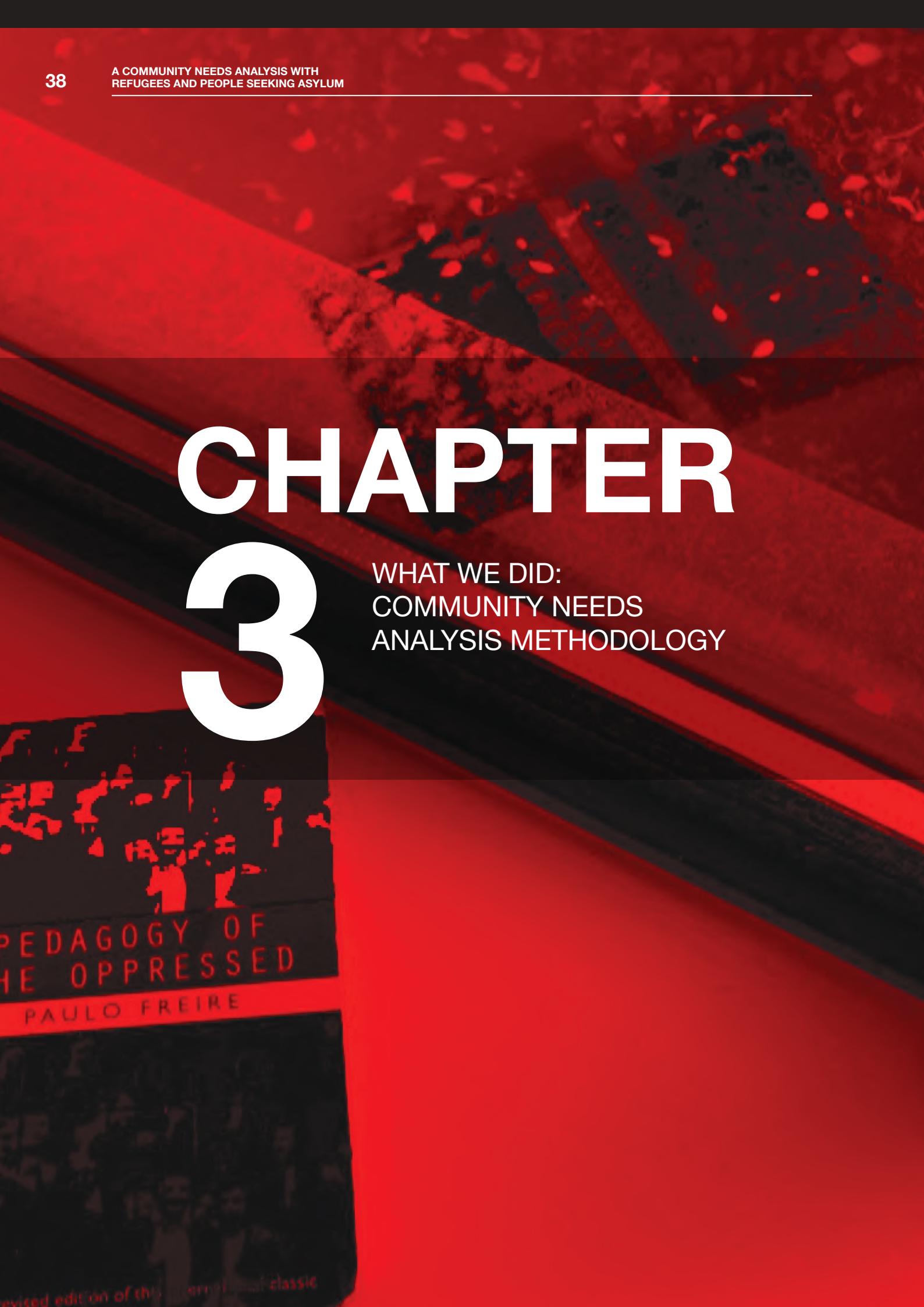
93 Ní Raghallaigh, Dr. M., Foreman, M., Feeley, M., Moyo, S., Wenyi Mendes, G., Bairéad, C. (2016). Transition: from Direct Provision to life in the community. Dublin, Irish Refugee Council.

94 Study in Ireland: A guide for International Students. Available at: https://www.educations.com/study-guides/europe/study-in-ireland/tuition-fees-18991

This participant had been living in Ireland for a number of years but the application process automatically directed them to the international students' office, where they began receiving multiple automated emails about transport options from the airport and accommodation options. The point being, that the system is so complex that even professionals working in the field struggle to navigate it and therefore to direct applications from refugees correctly. To provide a concrete example as to how complicated the eligibility criteria are in relation to higher education access, the section regarding nationality and eligibility for the Free Fees Initiative specifically with regard to refugees and people seeking asylum on the HEA website runs to just under 2,500 words.[95]

Therefore, while we provide a backdrop in terms of policy and legality in reference to refugees in Ireland as described in this chapter and throughout the report, we are primarily concerned with the experiences of the human beings going through the process. Chapters five and six describe these experiences in detail, in recognition and assertion that the true experts in terms of what it is like to access higher education while currently or formerly part of the protection process in Ireland, are the people who have to go through it.

95 https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/course-fees/



CHAPTER 3

WHAT WE DID: COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

3. WHAT WE DID: COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

"When I was taking this picture, I was thinking, 'Okay, how can I show that duality?' The book is here, but it's also there. There was something about trying to fit into Irish society, because there was always feeling that maybe I'm not good enough, that I need to push myself deeper and further, and because my education from back home was not valid or not valuable enough… That yearning that I still get, to want to continue, it feels like I wanted to win over Direct Provision, or I wanted to reclaim the years…and just to kind of bring back the years that I lost"

Focus group Participant

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Following an impactful CNA with the Pathways Centre for Prisoners and Former Prisoners,[96] which helped to inform a formal partnership between Maynooth University and Mountjoy Prison with the aim of improving access to education for people with convictions, the research and community engagement process for this CNA followed a similar structure based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) frameworks.[97] PAR involves research partners, researchers, and participants, collaboratively leading and developing the project at all stages in an iterative cycle of research, reflection, and action. The principle of PAR is that stakeholders are invited into participative and democratic relationships in which they are encouraged to engage in genuine collaborative leadership,[98] in any work on access initiatives or strategies relevant to their cohort. Peer-research was employed as a methodology to better enable this democratic engagement as described below.

A total of 10 peer-researchers were recruited who also participated in the research process. Of these 10, two were recruited as principal-peer-researchers. All 10 were either people who had been granted refugee status, leave to remain, or who were at some stage in the international protection application process. They all also had some form of higher education experience.

3.2 PEER-TO-PEER-RESEARCH

A peer-to-peer-research approach was used, in an attempt to generate authentic insights as well as to have a better understanding of the barriers at play for this cohort in terms of progression to HE. The rationale behind the peer-to-peer approach was to actively encourage participation in a solution-focused style of research incorporating egalitarian and dialogic involvement.[99] The process was developed with a focus on participation and empowerment, and in recognition that peers are experts within their field of experience. The 'insider' knowledge and position of the peer-researchers, and the manner in which they are able to frame research questions and interpret responses, we believe has the potential to facilitate a deeper understanding of the support needs of this group.

Connolly,[100] notes participating in research can reinforce feelings of powerlessness within society if participants are not democratically involved in the process, and if they see no direct change or insight as a consequence of the research. This method strove to do the opposite, therefore a core reason for employing a peer-to-peer methodology was to minimise power imbalances in the research process.[101]

96 Meaney, S. (2019). Community Needs Analysis with the Pathways Centre for Prisoners and Former Prisoners – A pilot study as part of College Connect. Maynooth University: Ireland

97 Heron, J., & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm. Qualitative Inquiry, 3(3), 274-294.

98 Bland, N. (2017). Pioneering Collaborative Leadership: A Facilitated Approach to Learning in Action. Edinburgh: What Works Scotland (University of Edinburgh).

99 Denzin, N. K. (2010). The qualitative manifesto: A call to arms. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

100 Connolly, P. (2003). Ethical Principles for Researching Vulnerable Groups. Available from: https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/victims/docs/connolly03.pdf

101 Lushey, C. & Munro, E.R., 2014. Peer research methodology: an effective method for obtaining oung people's perspectives on transitions from care to adulthood? *Qualitative Social Work*, 14(4), pp. 522-537.

The participation of the peer-researchers at the focus groups and other research processes elicited rich dialogue and empathic discussion, which may not have been possible if the conversations were facilitated by people who did not have first-hand experience of the protection system.

3.3 PEER-RESEARCHER SELECTION PROCESS

Peer-researchers were recruited through a variety of networking methods. First, the Irish Refugee Council recommended some people who fit the eligibility criteria of having refugee status or being at some stage of the protection process, as well as critically having experience of HE. There were also recommendations from the four HEIs linked to College Connect and who participated on the research oversight group. This group informed and guided this research at various stages throughout the process. We were considerate of male to female ratio, as well as having representation from a member of the Syrian community or another re-settled refugee representative.

Some of the colleges put out poster calls through their Student's Union and University of Sanctuary Committees. The result of this was a number of expressions of interest from interested candidates across the various colleges. The team at College Connect developed a recruitment process in order to make an informed choice as to their suitability. Even though the initial plan was to recruit six peer-researchers, after the application forms were received, a decision was made to take all candidates who had applied – bringing the total number of peer-researchers to 10. In addition to a formal application, all peer-researchers were reached out to by telephone for an informal interview that discussed the research more in-depth and laid out the commitment that was required to participate.

In the early stages of recruiting peer-researchers, a few potential persons were recommended by referrals. One declined out of fear that their participation in the research could result in an adverse outcome for their protection application. This person had been in a Direct Provision centre for six years and, 'just couldn't risk it'. Another was forced to decline because of parental, study, and work commitments. Even before the research proper had commenced, there were already glimpses of some of the sensitive but topical issues that would be highlighted in this study.

Because of the COVID-19 lockdown implemented by the government at the time of recruitment, an inaugural meeting was held online on Microsoft Teams where peer- researchers met with each other as well as the College Connect research team. At the meeting, the College Connect research team gave the peer-researchers an overview of the project and listened to the expectations that they had for the research.

3.4 PEER-RESEARCHER TRAINING

Peer-researcher training was facilitated by the research team and designed experientially, in that the two principal-peer-researchers, Zoryana Pshyk and Ronald Kayinga, who had prior experience with using the creative method (Photovoice), facilitated a session modelling the process of using Photovoice so that peer-researchers could experience both participating in a research focus group, as well as observing the role of facilitator. The principal-peer-researchers explored their experiences of education, re-engagement with education, and what encouraged/discouraged progression to HE, while peer-researchers were able to ask questions regarding the process.

The second stage of the training, which was broken into five segments, involved reflecting on the process of the focus group and exploring the various stages of the research in more detail including;

- Informed Consent
- Ethics and limits to confidentiality clause
- Researcher skills – listening, honouring all voices, managing participant input, outlier view, etc
- Research Methods – focus groups and use of photovoice
- Data protection
- Signposting of counselling supports for participants

The practicalities of the research, such as how the focus groups would be recorded, as well as writing up research notes were also covered.

3.5 SPIRASI & MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Spirasi is a humanitarian, intercultural, non-governmental organisation that works with asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrant groups, with a particular concern for the survivors of torture. It was set up in 1999 by the Spiritans in response to the rapidly evolving migration and asylum situation in Ireland. In its 20- year history, Spirasi has now offered rehabilitation services to over 5,000 victims of torture. It continues to offer English Language classes and has seen over 2,000 students pass through its doors since 1999.

Mental health concerns of refugees and asylum-seekers are more complex than those of the general population.[102] Refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants have been identified as suffering up to ten times the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than others, although for many, the term PTSD is not appropriate because the process of migration into an alien and frequently hostile culture can mean that the trauma is still ongoing.[103] Surprisingly, given what we know about events that may have induced the migration; fleeing war, poverty;[104] trauma, torture, human trafficking, violence, exploitation, grief and loss;[105] people in the protection process are not universally assessed for vulnerability nor mental health upon arrival into Ireland, so there is no system in place for the delivery of targeted mental health supports, nor training or resourcing of General Practitioner and primary care to meet the complex needs of this vulnerable population.[106] Bulelani Mfaco, spokesman for the Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI), has called for the deployment of proper resources for people in Direct Provision in need of mental health services.[107]

102 AKIDWA. (2020). Let's Talk: Mental Health Experiences of Migrant Women. AKIDWA: Dublin.
103 College of Psychiatrists of Ireland (2017, p.6) The Mental Health Service Requirements in Ireland for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants from Conflict Zones, Position Paper. March 2017. https://www.irishpsychiatry.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Mental-Health-Service-requirements-for-aslumseekers-refugees-and-immigrants-150517-1.pdf (College of Psychiatrists Ireland)
104 Ibid, p.1.
105 Doras. (2020). Mental Health and Direct Provision: Recommendations for Addressing Urgent Concerns. Available at: https://doras.org/doras-report-highlights-urgent-need-for-better-mental-health-services-in-direct-provision-centres/
106 AKIDWA. (2020). Let's Talk: Mental Health Experiences of Migrant Women. AKIDWA: Dublin.
107 The Irish Times (2021). 'We don't want to see another person in pain when we can support them' People in direct provision need 'proper' mental health resources, campaigners say. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/we-don-t-want-to-see-another-person-in-pain-when-we-can-support-them-1.4437420

In recognition of the sensitive nature of the research and how participation on this project may be emotive for both participants and peer-researchers, College Connect partnered with Spirasi to provide counselling support for anyone taking part who wanted to avail of this. Spirasi is the national centre for rehabilitation of victims of torture in Ireland, and specifically a service for survivors of torture. However, in this instance and for the duration of the research project, Spirasi were able to offer their expertise by way of providing a tailored counselling service to support participants in the research should they require it.

Counselling support was provided confidentially, and participants did not have to let College Connect or the peer-researchers know that they intended to avail of the service. John O'Donoghue from Spirasi delivered an information session to the peer-researcher team, and participants were provided with email addresses and phone numbers at the time of the focus groups. Up to five free sessions of counselling were made available to each participant who requested it; effective almost immediately following initial contact with the service.

3.6 PEER-RESEARCHER'S PILOT FOCUS GROUPS

The focus groups with peer-researchers were held on different days and times to accommodate the availability of the participants. During the pilot focus groups, Photovoice was the method used to encourage critical discussion. Participants were asked to bring photographs that represented the barriers or hurdles they experienced in accessing higher education. The sharing that resulted from using the photographs to elicit conversation was more emotive and descriptive than was expected in an online forum. Participants were also hugely supportive and encouraging of each other in the focus group discussion. Patricia Leavy,[108] upholds the belief that this is because the arts evoke emotional responses, and so the dialogue sparked by arts-based practice is highly engaged. Furthermore, by connecting people on emotional and visceral levels, artistic forms of representation facilitate empathy.

Dr. Sarah Meaney Sartori or Declan Markey as members of the College Connect team were present in all virtual focus groups to take control of the recording and address any technical issues that may have arisen. There were concerns before the focus groups started that a virtual research process may take away from the richness of the methodology, but the contrary was the case. Focus groups were rich, highly emotive, and powerful. The virtual space did not reduce the impact the process had on all who were involved, as participants continued to refer to the connection and empowerment they experienced through the process.

Focus groups were broken into two segments. The first segment involved the use of the chosen photographs as an entry into discussions. Participants had the option of a break before the next segment. In the second segment, the chosen facilitator for the session led the participants in a discussion around three follow-up questions:

108 Leavy, P., (2009), '*Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*'. London: Guilford Press.

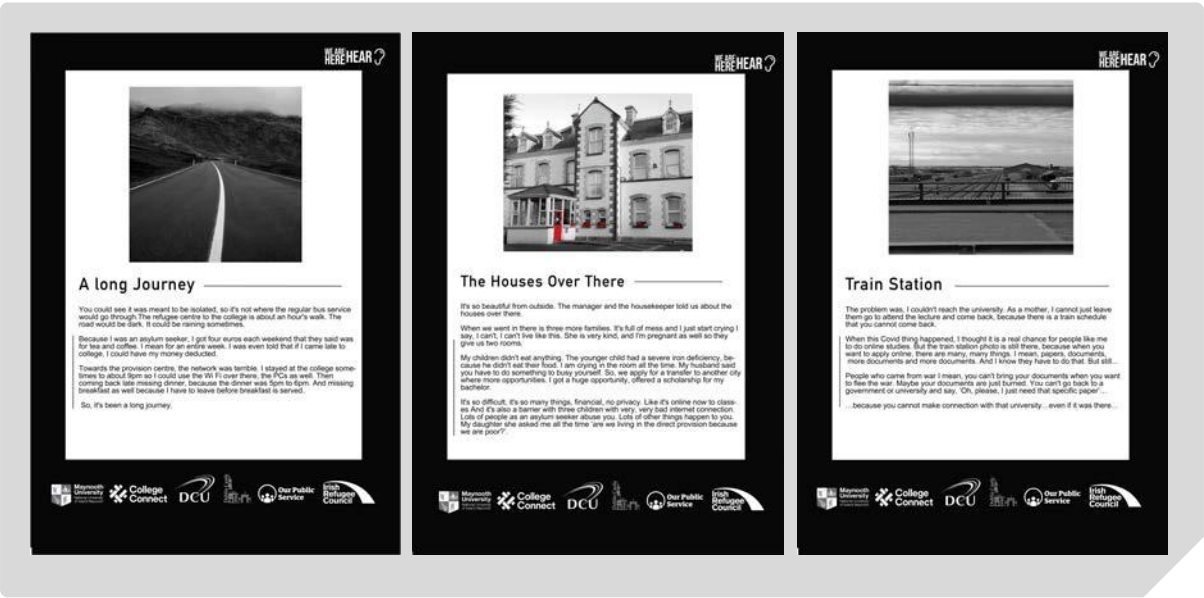
1 What made a positive difference (or supported) your entry into education?

2 What hindered/impeded that process?

3 What would improve higher education access for you and others in similar circumstances? 'If you could change one thing….'

After critical discussions, the facilitators checked with participants on how they were feeling before closing the group and reminding everyone of Spirasi's support.

3.7 PHOTOVOICE



Photovoice is a participatory feminist methodology that was initially applied to balance power dynamics between the researcher and the researched. Despite limited research conducted to date with refugees using the method, there is consensus that Photovoice provides a unique opportunity for participants to engage actively with their own narratives and take ownership of their own stories, as well as helping to capture the nuances and explore the multiple layers of the complexities of their experiences.[109]

The peer-research team were given training in Photovoice as a methodology and the following guidelines were followed and adhered to and communicated to participants;

1 Take a photo of something that represents a barrier/support for you in your education journey in Ireland

2 Try not to use people and if you do, don't show faces

109 Miled, N. (2020). Can the displaced speak? Muslim refugee girls negotiating identity, home and belonging through Photovoice. *Women's Studies International Forum* Volume 81, July–August 2020, 102381. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2020.102381

3 Make sure the photo is yours and that you can give permission for it to be used

4 Be prepared to be able to explain why you chose this picture, what it represents for you (it does not need to make sense to anyone except you).

Point two, relating to not showing faces or photographing people, came from advice from the research oversight group on this project, and links strongly to our comments regarding the sharing of personal narrative or case studies on pp.112 and 113 of this report in the chapter on 'Recommendations'. Given that we cannot know the full extent of the circumstances by which people had to leave or flee their country of origin, and given the nature of the online world, where photographs can be travelled and traced around the globe in seconds, it was decided to err on the side of privacy protection and do as many other organisations, who work with refugees and people in the protection process, and not include images of people in the Photovoice.

The focus group discussions began with the sharing of photos and was therefore rooted in what Connolly,[110] posits is the 'golden rule' of adult education in that the process begins with participants' lived experiences. The foregrounding of participants' Photovoice, we contend, formed the foundation for trust-building and dialogue that followed. Participants on this research engaged fully with the methodology, and at the end of the field research we had 40 pictures, begging the question 'what next?'

3.8 FOCUS GROUP WITH WIDER PARTICIPANTS

The peer-researchers carried out/participated in a total of 14 focus group sessions, with 39 participants. Focus groups were deliberately kept small because of the sensitivity of the topic being discussed as well as because of the limitations of the online platform (MS Teams). Each focus group had between four and seven members. Focus groups lasted between one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half hours, depending on the group. Following the focus group, participants were provided with an electronic voucher as an expression of gratitude for sharing their time and experience, and reminded of the availability of counselling support with Spirasi.

3.9 COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS SURVEY

Due to the COVID – 19 public health safety restrictions imposed by the Government during the research period, and the impact the situation had on people living in Direct Provision especially,[111] in order to capture the experiences of more people within the research category, we also developed a 15-question survey.[112]

110 Connolly, B. (2008). Adult Learning in Groups. England: McGraw Hill Open University Press.

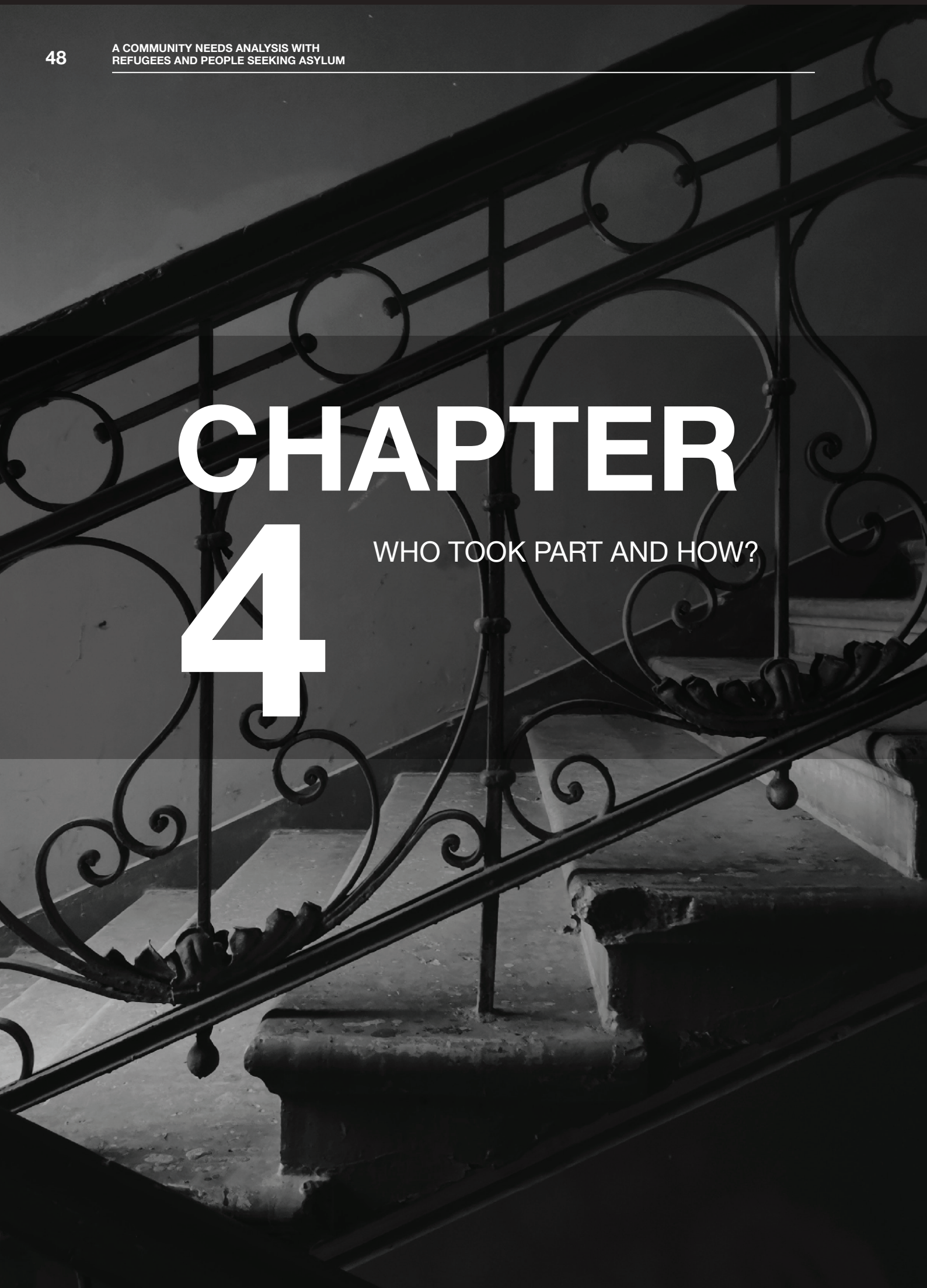
111 Aside from the fact that there were clusters of Covid 19 outbreaks in Direct Provision Centres, a lot of intending participants mentioned not having privacy nor stable internet connection to participate in the Focus Groups. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/vulnerable-asylum-seekers-must-be-moved-from-centres-without-delay-1.4209425

112 Survey is attached to this report as an appendix

The design of the survey was done in collaboration with the peer-research team and the research oversight group for this project. The survey, which adopted a grounded theory approach, in that the questions emerged from the focus group interviews with participants, contained both open and closed questions. It was designed to capture the same information that participants in the focus groups discussed, as well as being able to substantiate the focus group findings with quantitative data. As such, the themes of the closed questions were in relation to; status, recognition of prior learning, level of education and length of time in Direct Provision.

In terms of open questions, participants were given the space to engage with the question and input answers of any length. A total of 104 participants responded to the survey, which enables us to provide a clearer profile of research participants as outlined in the next chapter.

It is important to note that many, if not most, of the focus group participants also responded to the survey. The dissemination of the survey relied heavily on the peer-research team, who shared it with their focus group participants and also more widely on their social media networks. Therefore, we do not see the survey data as separate to the focus group data, but that it provides a more detailed picture of research participants, and one that was better to gather through a survey rather than putting people on the spot or perhaps making them feel uncomfortable by asking these questions in a focus group setting, which by nature is less anonymous.



CHAPTER 4

WHO TOOK PART AND HOW?

4. WHO TOOK PART AND HOW?

"People just like me, they are betting everything on education, you know, and they are ready. They are ready to borrow money just to be able to find their space in this country"

Focus Group Participant

4.1 SELECTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Research participants were invited through the use of a poster advertising the research online as well as through peer- researchers' connections and by word of mouth. The poster was initially designed by one of the peer-researchers thus embodying the participatory and democratic ethos of the research methodology. Peer-researchers also purposively sought out friends and colleagues whom they felt would be able to make a strong contribution to the research based on their past educational experience and attainment.

4.2 PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WHO TOOK PART IN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Between October 2020 and 1st March 2021, the research team carried out 14 online focus groups with refugees and people in the protection process. In total 39 people took part in in-depth research conversations on access and barriers to Higher Education using Photovoice as a methodology. The breakdown is as follows;

- **14 Online Focus Groups – 24 Hours of Material**
- **21 Female - 18 Male Participants**

- 8 Programme Refugee
- 12 Protection Applicant (Asylum Seeker)
- 14 Convention Refugee
- 3 Granted Subsidiary Protection
- 2 Don't know

Total 39 Participants

4.3 PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WHO TOOK PART IN THE SURVEY

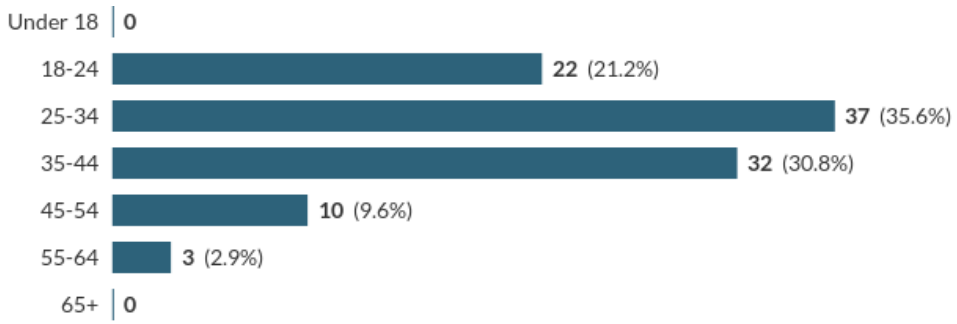
The College Connect & Irish Refugee Council - Access to Education Survey for People Seeking Asylum or with Refugee Status was answered by 104 refugees and people in the protection process. The survey launched on the 11th of February 2021 and closed on the 31st of March 2021. Participants answered 15 questions in an online survey that took approximately three-five minutes to complete. The survey questions were finalised following the focus group discussions, so afforded the team the opportunity to reflect on what data would be most useful to substantiate the focus groups. As such, the breakdown of survey participants is more detailed and is as follows;

- **104 Survey Responses – 1560 questions answered**
- **54 Female – 50 Male**

4.3.1 AGE PROFILE

22 of the participants who answered the survey were between 18 and 24 years old. The majority, 37 participants, were between 25 and 34. 32 were between the ages of 35 and 44. 10 participants were between the ages of 45 and 54, and there were three participants aged between 55 and 64. Therefore we could summarise that the majority of survey respondents; 69 in total, were between the ages of 25 and 44.

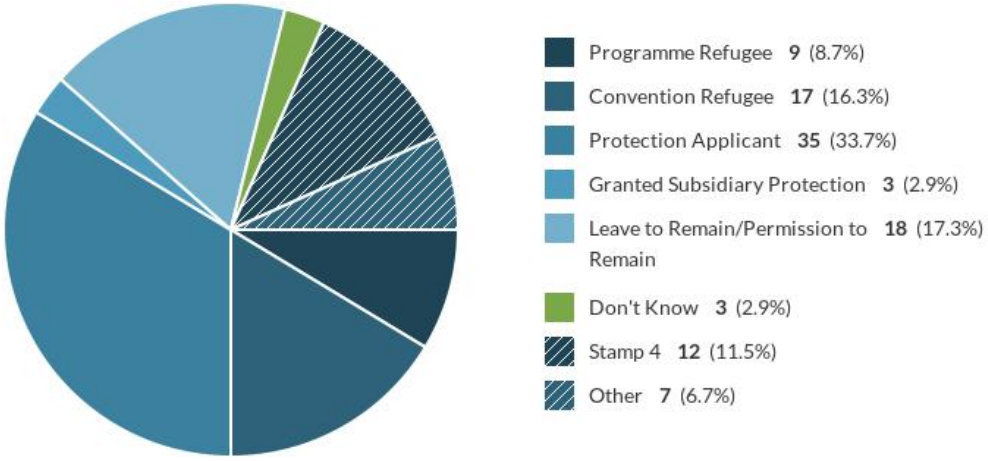
AGE PROFILE CHART



4.3.2 STATUS

In terms of status, the survey offered more selection choices than focus group participants had been offered, to try to provide a more nuanced picture of the status of people in the protection process. There were nine **Programme Refugees**, seventeen **Convention Refugees**, thirty-five **Protection Applicants**, who took part in the survey, as well as three, who were **Granted Subsidiary Protection**. On top of this, eighteen identified as having **Leave to Remain/ Permission to Remain**, twelve as having a **Stamp 4**, three said they '**Didn't Know**' and seven selected '**Other**'. Of those in the 'other' category; two were **Family Reunification**, two said **Asylum Seeker/Seeking Asylum**, which is the same as protection applicant, one was a refugee and is now an Irish citizen, one received a Ministerial letter, and one was still processing their Leave to Remain. The majority of survey respondents; thirty-seven in total, were people seeking protection.

STATUS CHART



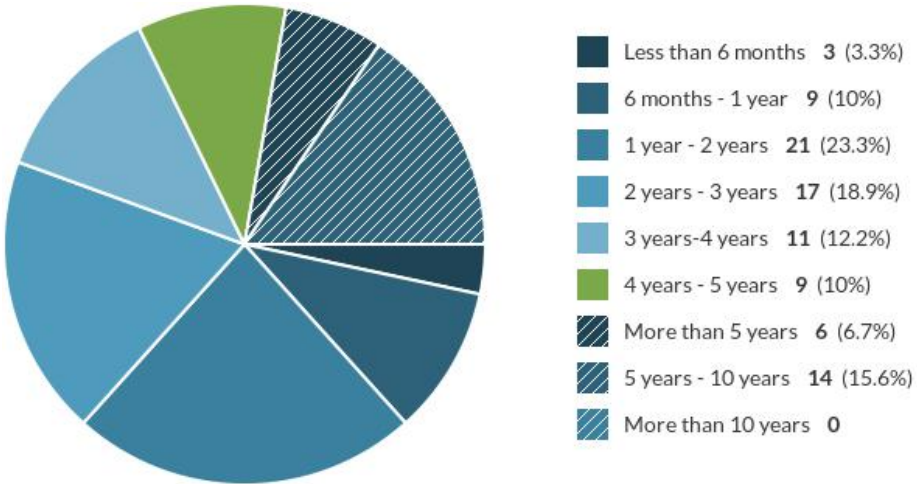
4.3.3 DIRECT PROVISION

Noting that the system of Direct Provision has itself been highlighted as a barrier to education, we also asked survey respondents if they were currently in Direct Provision at the time of responding. The response was exactly 50/50 with fifty-two respondents currently in Direct Provision and fifty-two not currently in Direct Provision.

The follow-on question asked whether the respondent had ever been in Direct Provision, and eighty-seven respondents, or 83.7%, answered affirmatively. Therefore, only seventeen respondents to our survey, or 16.3% had never spent time in Direct Provision.

Of the eighty-seven respondents who had spent time in Direct Provision, we asked how long. Nine respondents, or 10%, had spent between six months and one year, and just three had spent under six months. The vast majority, fifty-eight people, had spent between one and five years. Twenty had spent over five years and less than ten years.

LENGTH OF TIME IN DIRECT PROVISION CHART



4.3.4 EDUCATION LEVEL OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A common barrier to higher education in Ireland raised in focus group discussions was the issue of recognition of prior learning. Therefore, in the survey, we asked respondents if they had a university qualification from their country of origin. 40%, or 42 respondents have a prior university qualification, and of these, only 13 claim to have been successful in getting their qualification recognised in Ireland.

At the time of this survey, the majority, or 52.9% / 55 people, were currently studying in Ireland, with the majority of these (40 respondents) studying at higher education level; 12 at Level 7, 17 at Level 8, 2 at Masters Level and 1 at PhD.

The vast majority of survey respondents, 77.9% or 81 people, intended to be studying in Ireland in 2021-2022. Of those who said they wouldn't be studying in 2021-22, or who didn't know, the answers ranged from;

> ***"I am a graduate now and working."***
>
> Survey Participant

...to

> ***"I would like to do a PhD, but it is inaccessible from a financial perspective."***
>
> Survey Participant

DELAYED FUTURES

‘Learn English’

Learn how we roll out our sentences, how we twist our lips over half complete sounds we picked up from the supermarket, the shops, the shops, the shops.

‘learn about the culture’

Learn how they happen here, how the seasons come around the calendar differently to where you came from, what time the leaves fall and return, how they don’t remind you of anything you know.

‘’you don’t have anybody to call and say, ‘Hey, I am lost’

‘learn the way’

Learn the way about, Dju know like, learn about how the streets move, what the crawls of an afternoon bustle can feel like, how the roads lead, how the people have all found your eyes in an ocean of froth white faces.

‘it’s up to us to turn the wheels

to say okay, don’t, don’t get discouraged’

‘learn how to get the bus’

Learn this yellow bus and the numbers that apply to you, learn that it will take you to whatever home you find here, that you build here, that you crave here.

‘learn how to take the ticket of the train’

Learn that you must have your papers everywhere you go. the little ones, the receipts, the licences, the permissions. learn them.

‘If I don’t make it, I know my boys are the next generation
They will make it’

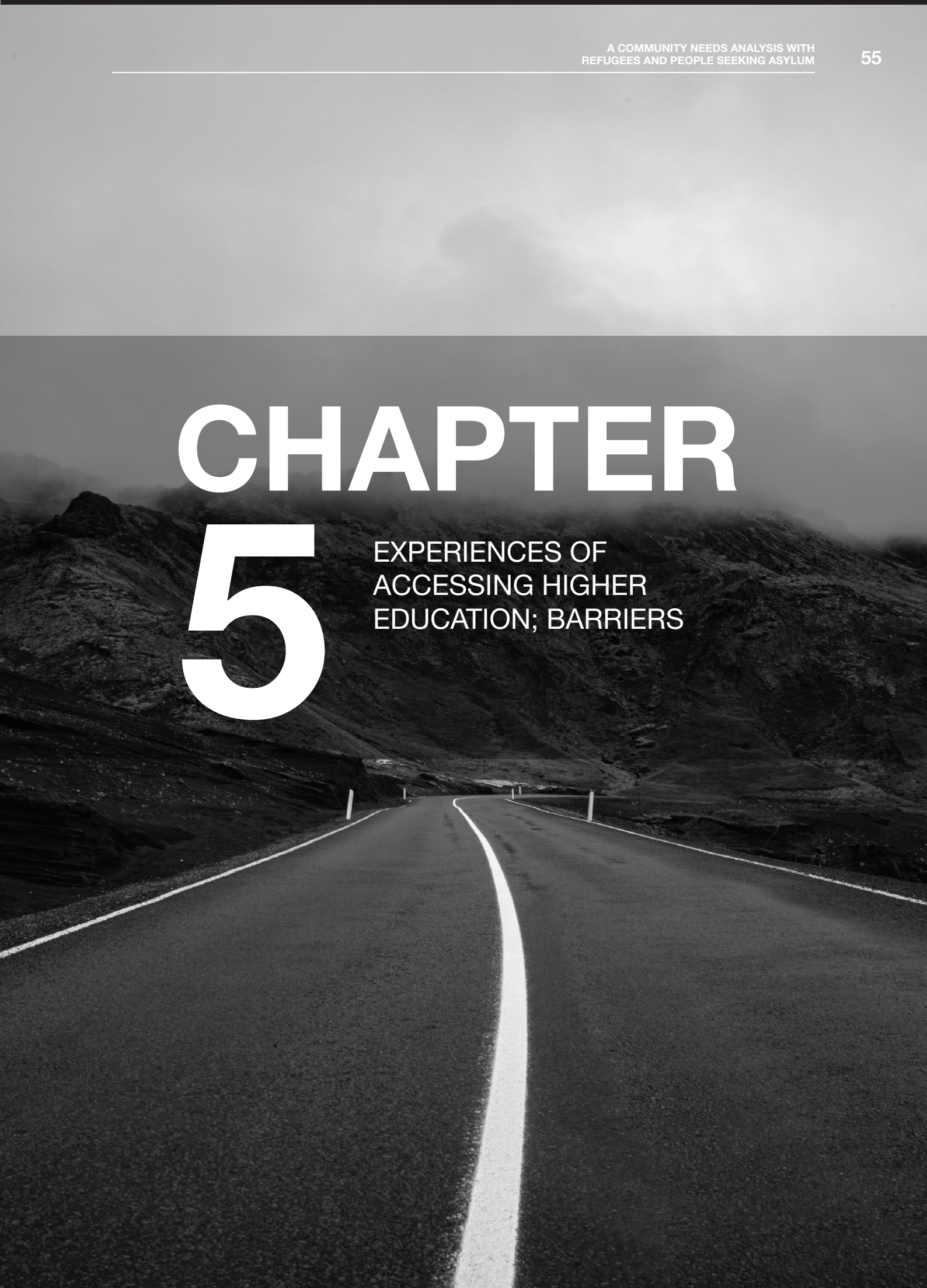
They will learn it from me.

‘What kind of paper will limit that dream?’

None.

Can.

Poem by Felicia Olusanya AKA Felispeaks in response to transcript poetry.



CHAPTER 5

EXPERIENCES OF ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION; BARRIERS

5. EXPERIENCES OF ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION; BARRIERS

"…most people are buying practical things like coats and boots from grants because most have clothes from donations which are ill-fitting. And going back to education as a mature student, you already feel like you stick out and don't want to feel underdressed… not because it's about fashion, it's a self-esteem issue, where often one already feels like they're different and stick out in the class. Being underdressed for cold days makes it hard to focus on studying"

Survey Participant

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research was to find out more about the experience of accessing higher education for refugees and people in the protection process in Ireland. As described in the methodology chapter, we asked participants to begin the discussion using Photovoice and by bringing a photograph to represent that experience. All 39 participants shared a photograph, and unanimously described the extreme difficulties that they encountered in their bid to progress their education and rebuild their lives. Difficulties such as being quoted international college fees despite receiving €19.10 and living in a Direct Provision hostel. Barriers such as; not being able to access food or transport while attending college; not being able to get prior education and qualifications recognised; and not being able to access student grants or support schemes due to not having the required residency permissions. People became visibly upset while speaking of the toll this effort took on their physical and mental health.

Following the Photovoice sharing, researchers teased out the supports and the agencies that participants relied on to carry them to and through higher education. Non-governmental organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council, Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project, and St Vincent de Paul, were all described as having played a vital role. Similarly for many participants, the University of Sanctuary scholarship scheme and SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) were integral to peoples' educational journeys, while individual acts of kindness and strangers 'going above and beyond' were mentioned by many. These supports will be described in detail in Chapter Six.

5.2 BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

In this section, we will discuss the themes that arose from the participants' discussions about the barriers they faced in accessing higher education in Ireland. These barriers were thematically extracted from both the focus group conversations and the survey and are discussed in order of the frequency by which they were cited by participants.

5.2.1 INTERNATIONAL FEES

> *"But the problem is you began as an international student, and this means the fees are so expensive. And we had to look because I wanted to do Business and Accounting and to take this lecture course the fees were about 12,000 euro and there was no way I could take that option because you can only get 20 euro …."*
>
> Research Participant

By far the most highlighted barrier to access that emerged from both the focus groups and the survey was the issue of international fees. This is not inconsistent with research available that lists financial capacity as the 'most significant barrier of access to higher education'.[113] Up until 2015, international protection applicants and refugees could only access HE if they could pay the international fees set by the HEIs and ITs as a result of their status or lack thereof. In September 2015, the Student Support Scheme came into force that gave International Protection applicants that met certain conditions, the opportunity to attend higher education without paying fees. In 2019, the eligibility requirements were changed to allow international protection applicants who have been in the protection system for at least three years (and after three years in the Irish education system), to apply for a grant under the Pilot Support Scheme.[114] In August 2020, the requirements were relaxed so that people seeking asylum no longer needed to have completed the Leaving Certificate or have spent three years in an Irish school to be able to apply for a student grant when moving on to third-level, thus opening up the scheme to protection applicants, who have been in the system for at least three years.[115]

113 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.

114 Ibid, p. 17

115 The Irish Times. (2020). Asylum seekers without Leaving Cert now eligible for third-level grant- Applicants must have spent at least three years living in Ireland before applying. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/asylum-seekers-without-leaving-cert-now-eligible-for-third-level-grant-1.4326085

Even though the current policy regime is much more accessible, the system still precludes refugees and international protection applicants from higher education grants and fee aids if they have not resided in the country for a minimum period of three-years. Even though the basis for the three-year argument is one of supposed 'equality' as the three-year rule also applies to Irish citizens, we would argue (and our research would support this argument) that the rule disproportionately impacts refugees and international protection applicants. The decision taken this year in 2021 and to come into effect for the academic year 2021/2022, that will see people in Direct Provision no longer having to pay international fees for two-year Level 5 and Level 6 programmes (PLC courses), which currently run at €3600 per academic year, is also welcome. We do also acknowledge that as these changes in legislation have come into effect over the course of this research project, so it is possible that the frustration regarding international fees may abate in future research on the issue. Nonetheless, it is important not to discount those who partook in this study and have been directly impacted by these policies, by documenting their feedback.

> ***"They told me that I have to pay an international fees… around 17,000 or something. So, I was like, I've been here for the past seven years, and I can't access that money. They said, 'No, no, you're not European either so you're International. So, you do not qualify for another scholarship, so you have to pay this money'. So, that was the barrier."***
>
> Survey Participant

Many respondents highlighted the absurdity of asking people who had no legal right to work,[116] and who were in receipt of thirty-eight euro and eighty cents per week,[117] for fees running into thousands of euros. We would also surmise that it must be uncomfortable for the person on the other side of the desk, particularly if it is apparent that the person making the inquiry is living in a Direct Provision centre and therefore living in poverty.

116 In 2018, the Irish Supreme Court declared that the practice of not allowing people seeking asylum gain access to employment was unconstitutional. As at the time of writing this report, people seeking asylum, who are not recipients of a deportation order and who have stayed at least 6 months in the country now have the right to take up employment. This is a relatively recent development and so a lot of the respondents still referred to the hardship they encountered when they were not legally allowed to enter into employment,

117 Direct provision center residents were until the year 2000 paid weekly stipends of Nineteen Euro and ten cents. In 2017, the stipends increased to Twenty one euro and ten cents. In 2019, the new rate came into force and DP center residents now receive Thirty eight Euro eighty cents a week.

"You're requested to pay international fees, which goes about 3000 to 5000 euros for an asylum seeker who was not permitted to work. Also receiving only 21,22 euros each week. It's quite laughable that they would still actually put it on the system that you're required to pay international fees. So, in itself, the whole system was actually just in place to prevent us… from actually you know, engaging in these things."

Focus Group Participant

Some participants highlighted the lengths they went to in order to be able to pay the fees, which is perhaps a less documented impact of this barrier.

"Then like everybody was doing I started to go to Paddy Power and play a few lines and pray for luck that maybe something comes up. I managed to raise about… I think it was €800. The fees was I think it was it was €2000 or €2500 and then I had only 800 with me."

Focus Group Participant

"And I always go with my certificate wherever I go with it and show people how I did pass. So, some will offer me maybe 100 euros, some maybe they gave me 50 euros. They said that you if you can just bring a deposit,. Then I brought €550 within two weeks. That's the worst thing. they strip out all your dignity, all your human being."

Focus Group Participant

One participant who is currently attending higher education in a college in Dublin, spoke about his difficulty in accessing education while still in the protection process and contrasted his circumstances then with his present circumstance now that he had been granted asylum. He said;

"3000 or 5000 for the tuition fee, and then you also have to pay the student contribution of I forget how much that is right now. So, you know, it's actually quite inundated, you see, but the thing good now, I have my documents right now. So, I'm entitled to SUSI grant, I'm in college right now."

Focus Group Participant

In the survey, 66% of all respondents listed finances as a barrier, with almost a third of those specifically referring to international fees as the most hindersome barrier to their accessing education. One respondent commented that their major barrier was;

> *"Being charged international fees even though I have been living in Ireland for a long time."*
>
> Survey Participant

Despite the amendment to the Student Support Scheme that eased stringent eligibility criteria, refugees and people in the protection process who have stayed in Ireland for less than three years or who are subject to a deportation order will still be required to pay the international fees in order to access third-level education in Ireland. This will also be the case for children still in the protection process, who while they qualify for primary and secondary level education, are not automatically entitled to the Student Support Scheme to offset third-level fees.[118] We heard from young participants, who remained in limbo, as their parents were subject to deportation, which precluded them from furthering their education following completion of second-level schooling. The scope for educational development is further limited by the long-term uncertainty about residential status.[119]

> *"My son, he came back from school. And he's getting very high marks in…everything. But we discovered that there is another complicated thing that he has to stop studying for one year. He has to stop for one year. Doing what? Watching TV or playing video games? Doing what?"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"We were given a deportation order, but my mom chose to remain here. So, after I finished secondary school in 20XX, I was just basically stuck, really. I've done different courses here and there, but I can't get into college because of all of this"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

118 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.

119 Ibid p. 171.

The recent White Paper to End Direct Provision,[120] states that 'access to third-level education will be facilitated for current applicants who have resided three years or more within the system under a special financial support scheme similar to SUSI support', and recognises the 'difficulties encountered by applicants in accessing higher education' (p.121). However, we would align ourselves with the views of many of the participants of this study in that the three-year rule is unnecessarily prohibitory and serves to 'delay futures' needlessly.

5.2.2 FINANCES

> *"Irish citizens, they received I believe about 270 euros each week, but I got because I was asylum seeker was four euros each weekend and that they said was even for tea and coffee. I mean just for an entire week five days… I was actually even told that if I came late to college… or something I could have my money deducted"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Research available has shown that refugees and international protection applicants usually do not have financial means for full participation in society.[121] As mentioned, finances were cited by 66% of survey applicants as a major barrier to accessing education, and in a randomly selected interview transcript, the word 'money' was mentioned 27 times, while the word 'euro' appeared 12 times. Indeed, there was no focus group session where finance was not raised as a major barrier. The Student Assistance Fund (SAF), for example, a scheme that provides financial assistance for full-time HE students who are experiencing financial difficulties while attending college, is available often to students in receipt of SUSI grants, precluding many refugees and people in the protection process from financial support if they are unable to access this grant. Not one participant in either the survey or in focus groups mentioned this scheme as a source of support. Issues raised by respondents ranged from not having enough money to purchase books and academic materials to not being able to buy food or pay for transportation to school.

> *"But every time I came across obstacles in college like books, like not being able to get money to take transport, it really frustrated me…"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

120 Government of Ireland (2021). A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7aad0-minister-ogorman-publishes-the-white-paper-on-ending-direct-provision/

121 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense

"We met in the class and realised we are from X, the two of us. I say to him, listen, whenever we go to college together, I will give you my 20 euro, which was a 10 euro going and 10 euro coming back out of the 19 euro, I had to raise one euro to you know… Eventually, that friend of mine realised I was struggling and simply said, 'listen, I don't want you to pay. You'll pay me whenever you have money, but I don't want you to pay"

Focus Group Participant

"Now the greatest challenge was to get a bicycle. And it was very, very challenging, honestly. So, I had to look for a bicycle to buy and I had no money, so I spoke to a few people…"

Focus Group Participant

Some centres, like Mosney in Co Meath, have fully self-catering accommodation where residents can cook their own meals. Other centres have more limited cooking facilities where residents can cook on hobs in a communal area.[122] The remainder of centres provide canteen-style food over a counter, and the people living in Direct Provision centres are not allowed to cook any food independently.[123] Many participants in this study spoke about canteen-style meals, and cited not being able to access the canteen when they accessed education, and how it was prohibited for friends or other family members to collect food on your behalf.

"She said that we can only collect the food between nine and 10. By this time, I was already at school, and nobody's allowed to collect this food for you"

Focus Group Participant

"…coming back late missing dinner because the dinner was 5pm to 6pm. And missing breakfast as well because I have to leave before breakfast is served"

Focus Group Participant

122 https://sanctuaryrunners.ie/about-direct-provision/

123 Barry, K. (2014). What's food got to do with it: Food Experiences of Asylum Seekers in Direct Provision. NASC: Cork

"We didn't even bother about eating too much that term. We were receiving food from the canteen. We have to pick it up to receive food. If you went to school, nobody could collect food for you. That means you will be having no food throughout the day. If we had the money we'd buy bread. Sometimes we'd go to sleep without the bread"

Focus Group Participant

Some participants became visibly upset as they described how their children were also excluded from accessing the canteen by Direct Provision management, as some centres enforced arbitrary rules whereby children could only enter the canteen with the parent and not with a person who was minding them.

"It was a difficult time for us because we…are not having lunch and dinner…sorry… (crying) my kids were not getting lunch and dinner from the management"

Focus Group Participant

"My children didn't eat anything. The younger child had a severe iron deficiency"

Focus Group Participant

Aside from the issue of international fees, even for those who managed to be eligible for EU fees, the payment of student levies and the payment of these tuitition fees were also cited as a barrier for many respondents who were living in poverty.

"I knew I did not have enough money to continue with that course. And I was just simply forcing to do the course. I started now trying to negotiate"

Focus Group Participant

"And every time the university kept asking me, 'when are you going to pay?' …I told them 'listen, I'm in Direct Provision, and I'm not given enough money. And I don't have any sponsor, I am trying the best I can'. And you can imagine how that was. It was so frustrating"

Focus Group Participant

The respondents described the frustrations they felt after fighting hard to get a foot in the door in an institution, only to be met with financially crippling challenges. One student narrated how he had to go to places more than once seeking for financial assistance to get transport to get to college.

> ***"I even went to St. Vincent De Paul. That time they didn't help me. But at a later stage they helped me. I'm so thankful for them. They helped me with transport"***
>
> Survey Participant

Another respondent described their reliance on friends and family to assist with finances. In fact, many participants spoke of having to beg and borrow in order to realise their dream for a better future.

> ***"What helped me again, as I said, my friends, my family, my friends who I have gained in Ireland who so generously financially supported me, and the most important thing that they are not, what's the word, you know, they are not kind of asking me 'give us the money back..."***
>
> Focus Group Participant

One respondent who had been granted refugee status narrated how finances were still an issue even after they had got their status. This respondent despite having refugee status was still residing in Direct Provision centre and was in receipt of the SUSI grant.

> ***"...there's not a lot of money to be honest, because we are still living in Direct Provision. And they assume, like SUSI assumes that once we get our status, we are out of the way and doesn't take into consideration that we are living still in Direct Provision. We still like need to get food to buy on campus"***
>
> Survey Participant

More than one of the participants described the shame they felt when they could not go with their class-mates for meals in the student canteen because they could not afford to buy food, or when they had to walk long distances to get to school.

> *"He would say, 'Come with me'. And when he goes to the canteen, he would buy me food, you know. So, it was quite challenging"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"Like having the two euro just to buy coffee so that you can stand with the other guys and interact. Because believe me that two euro you could not have it"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"I couldn't tell anyone that I was walking"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"It was hard for me I would not eat out. I'll be hungry the whole day. Only to come and eat in the night"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

In the National Anti-Poverty Strategy,[124] the government adopted the following definition of poverty, underpinning all of its social inclusion and anti-poverty policy;

> *People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources, people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.*

This understanding is confirmed in the Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017, and is the basis for the revised National Social Target for Poverty Reduction 2012.[125] According to this definition, it can clearly be seen that those in Direct Provision are living in poverty, and today's 'others' remain marginalised outside the sphere of rights, in much the same way as the 'others' of the past were kept behind the walls of the Industrial Schools, Magdalen laundries and Mother and Baby homes.[126]

124 Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. (1997). Sharing the Progress. National Anti-Poverty Strategy: Dublin, Government Publications, p. 3.
125 https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/afb04e-poverty-measurement-and-monitoring/
126 Ní Chiosáin, B. (2018). Ireland and its vulnerable "others": the reception of asylum seekers in Ireland. Études irlandaises. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/4992

The discussions in this research regarding poverty were very emotive and created an almost palpable atmosphere of frustration and pain, particularly when participants spoke of the impact on their children.

> *"My daughter…she asked me all the time questions and she say like we are living in the Direct Provision because we are poor. We don't have money. We don't have anything, you know. And it's a big, you know, guilt in our heart like what we are providing to our children"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Many were emphatic in their call for awareness that beyond fees, they had other financial needs that they couldn't meet. Up until relatively recently, people seeking asylum were not allowed to access employment in Ireland. Even with the policy lifting the embargo on employment, following a Supreme Court declaration in 2017 that Ireland's ban on employment was unconstitutional,[127] many people seeking asylum still find it difficult to integrate and get decent paying jobs and worry that length of time out of the labour market and the subsequent deskilling will reduce their odds of attaining employment in the future.[128] Other issues such as race and gender intersect to worsen the experience of this cohort, particularly in relation to childcare covered later in this section.

5.2.3 LEGAL STATUS, IMMIGRATION PERMISSION (STAMP 4)

Another frequently cited barrier to accessing education was in relation to legal status, and in particular the requirement for an immigration residency permission entitled 'Stamp 4'. Stamp 4 is an immigration permission granted to people with work visas, spouses of EU citizens, refugees, and people with long term residency status. Prior to the recent changes in policy, only refugees with a Stamp 4 visa could apply for certain grants to cover the costs of higher education.[129] Upon the grant of an international protection application, a Stamp 4 is issued to the refugee.

Participants in this research however, described how in most universities, Institutes of Technologies and even Further Education colleges, they were denied access and admission because they did not have Stamp 4.

127 https://www.mhc.ie/latest/insights/employment-update-ban-on-asylum-seekers-working-in-ireland-declared-unconstitutional

128 Murphy, R., Keogh, B. & Higgins, A. (2018). Erosion of Meaning in Life: African Asylum Seekers' Experiences of Seeking Asylum in Ireland. Journal of Refugee Studies. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey027

129 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp.161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense

Whether this was because without a Stamp 4 the education provider would have been obliged to charge international fees, or whether it was a minimum requirement on the part of the education provider to be able to access the course, is unclear.

> *"I was asked for a Stamp 4. I wanted to do more technology at that particular time just to do something because I just didn't want to stay idle. I knew I wanted to make something of myself because I did not know when I was going to be given permission to stay in the country or when I was going to be out of the Direct Provision centre. So, they told me I could only join the course if I had a Stamp 4 and that was it. It was like everywhere you went, somebody stopped you"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"Now the first barrier is 'do you have Stamp 4?'. Now if we don't have Stamp 4 nobody wants to even listen to you"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"Where's your Stamp 4? So that is where the whole thing started. And me knowing very well that I don't have Stamp 4. I was in a limbo"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"…and being denied to go to school because I'm not having a Stamp 4. So, I was totally depressed"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Nevertheless, participants recounted there being some schools that did not insist on the Stamp 4, which though welcome seemed to be passed on via word of mouth and contributed to a sense of 'doing something wrong' on the part of participants.

> *"He said, 'listen, come and try it at X'. They seem to be accepting people and they seem to be a University of Sanctuary. And they seem to be allowing people to go in without Stamp 4"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"there's a Direct Provision centre there, and there's a college as well but they strictly specified that they do not take asylum seekers on the basis that maybe you don't have your Stamp 4. A few kilometres away and because in X they were not aware of asylum seekers and all of that because there was no Centre (Direct Provision) in that county and they didn't ask for a lot of things"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"I don't have a work permit and I haven't Stamp 4. So, when I went I spoke to them… 'it's okay, don't worry', they will try"*
>
> Survey Participant

Despite some people managing to slip through the net, the overwhelming sentiment from the focus groups was that Stamp 4 was a huge barrier especially for people seeking asylum, who had applied for a Stamp 4 and were kept waiting, in some cases years. These people were prevented from accessing education on the basis of a permission that they had no control over.

5.2.4 LACK OF INFORMATION

> *"And yeah, I have to do most of the research myself, which I'm not exactly... like, I don't know what resources I have to be referred to, or what kind of things I could miss in my research. Like there are always things hidden between the lines, I don't have all the information and there's no one ready to give me that information. And I found here in Ireland, there's so many abbreviations and different forms you have to fill in the form process…can just get confused and miss many crucial things"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Participants highlighted a dearth of information as one of the major barriers that they faced in accessing education. From their discussions, they painted a picture of unnecessary hardships occasioned as a result of lack of adequate or incorrect information. Apart from information relating to education, participants also highlighted the absence of basic day-to-day information such as bus and train timetables as well as general amenities. The latter kind of information being of particular importance, as many were coming newly into the country and had no support. Some participants described their experiences when they first arrived in Ireland; not knowing or understanding bus routes and schedules, finding the many abbreviations such as QQI, FETAC (and others used in education) very confusing, and just generally not knowing what they were (or were not) entitled to. All these served as barriers to their accessing education.

> *"It's our responsibilities to try to find out and learn and, but we don't have, we can't do everything. From the first year learn English, learn about the culture, learn the way, learn how to get the bus, learn how to take the ticket of the train"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"many Syrians I've been talking to they are absolutely lost"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"going to Dublin with the bus alone and losing myself. So, from station to station, and you have, you don't have anybody to call and say, 'Hey, I am lost, can you come and pick me up?"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"The website it says what level you are looking for, and then I write 9, okay. What is your bachelor? And then you can choose there are the various from psychological study to literature to law to anything, I say what is the relation between my bachelor and below? But I apply. And, and I do things wrong in the wrong way. So, I don't find my application later"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"You have to figure out, you know, navigate the steps, accessing the information and all that. There's not much information provided for you. It's quite difficult"*
>
> Survey Participant

Some respondents who had lived in Direct Provision Centres spoke about centre managers not disseminating information and keeping flyers advertising courses in their offices rather than circulating them. While the dissemination of information to residents may or may not be within the specific remit of Direct Provision management, it does hint at the culture of neglectful management evident in countless reports and newspaper articles detailing complaints regarding conditions made by residents to the media and the ombudsman.

> *"We should have information at the reception... Because we don't. We didn't have anything, any support and like, you have to find it yourself. ... Not the booklets for our people, which is with the manager and then in the rubbish bin. And nobody's gonna see it before the course started last week!"*
>
> Survey Participant

Participants decried their inability to get timely accurate information that could have helped them in making informed educational decisions. Most respondents cited their fellow Direct Provision Centre residents as their eventual source of information.

> *"I was the go-to guy I if you want to find anything about college"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"University of Sanctuary is very important these days, so I'm trying to spread this information"*
>
> Survey Participant

Some participants spoke about how receiving information late cost them scholarship opportunities as they only heard about the scholarship recruitments after the deadline.

"What was the purpose of me doing all that... and paying 500, the last money that I had in my pocket, only to see a month later for the Irish Refugee Council to advertise that they'll be helping students, you know, from the asylum community"

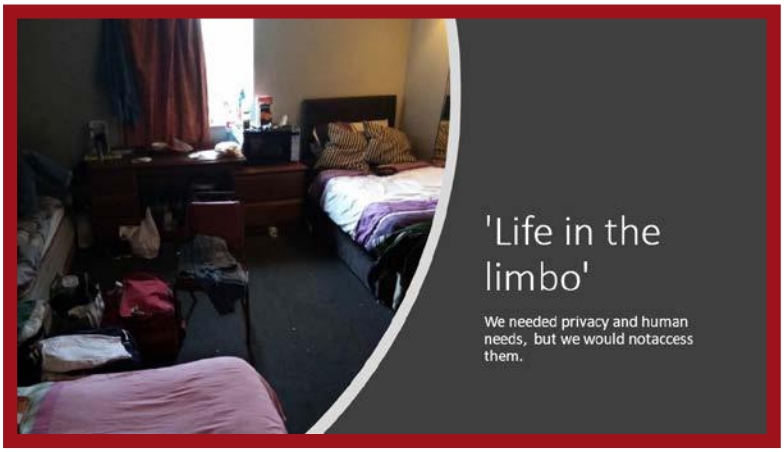
Focus Group Participant

It is not clear if the dearth of information about education is as a result of a lack of knowledge or the absence of information dissemination strategies. It has however been argued that Irish educational policy and strategy aimed towards refugees and international protection applicants are neither adequate nor explicit.[130] Perhaps it is this unclarity from the top that has fed into the poor information cycle across the system.

5.2.5 DIRECT PROVISION CENTRES

"To have shared a single room with strangers that you've never met. And people have their traumas from whatever they're coming from. I feel that nobody should go through that kind of system"

Focus Group Participant



Over 83% of survey participants (and we estimate higher in the focus group discussions) in this research have at one time lived in Direct Provision, while over 50% identify as currently residing in Direct Provision. Direct Provision is the system set up by the Irish Government in 2000 to cater for the basic needs of people awaiting decision on their protection application – accommodation, feeding and state provided medical services.

130 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.

As of September 2020, there were 44 Direct Provision centres nationwide, with a further 36 emergency accommodation locations such as hotels and guest houses, housing approximately 7,400 adults and children.[131] The 21-year-old system has continuously been denounced as inhumane and degrading.[132] Even though law provides that people seeking asylum are to stay in the Direct provision centres for a maximum of three months, in our research only 3.3% of survey respondents self-selected having staying in Direct Provision for less than six months. The majority, 23.3% had stayed between one and two years, while about 22.3% had stayed for between five and 10 years.[133] Other research has shown that when people speak about Direct Provision it is with consistent constructions of a space that is a source of stress, anxiety, depression, idleness, and lethargy where conditions are simultaneously cramped and lonely.[134]

> *"Like an animal, being forced roaming around your area"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

The living conditions in the Direct Provision centres were highlighted by participants in this study as an extreme barrier to education. Participants spoke emotively about the harsh difficulties they faced in living under the conditions provided in the centres, and how this affected their mental health and their drive to study.

> *"They strip out all your dignity, your human being, who you are. This system or this Direct Provision"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"And over the years that I've been in the system, over more than five years, I kept losing my skills, I felt that my identity of X was kind of like slipping through my fingers, I couldn't hold on to who I was. And this identity of Asylum Seeker had taken over me completely"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

131 https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/republic-ireland/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/

132 Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C. & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling identities in refugees learning through open, online higher education. DCU: Ireland

133 See 'length of time in DP chart' p.53

134 Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C. & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling identities in refugees learning through open, online higher education. DCU: Ireland

"So, like, excuse me to use the way like a prison…I wanted to go to school but no university or college around our area"

Focus Group Participant

One participant had to drop out of a course because she could not cope with the pressures that she was facing as a result of being in the Direct Provision centre. Participants often cited hostile centre staff, bullying by hostel managers, absence of Internet facilities, absence of conducive study spaces, being deprived food, and threats by Direct Provision centre management to report parents who tried to access education to the authorities, as some of the barriers they encountered.

"So, if you are going to school, and nobody to take care of your children, we're going to get the social workers to take the kids from you"

Focus Group Participant

"The owners of that Direct Provision centre, they used to come to the room. 'You have too much stuff. Why does the asylum seeker need so much stuff?' I have two small children. It was so invasive."

Focus Group Participant

Many participants talked about the effect of the institutionalising that occurs in the Direct Provision centres on their mental health.

And when we moved out, I was not realising mentally, how deeply traumatised and affected I was by my life in Direct Provision. And so, at the time I was doing X studies and I could not complete the course because my mental health was not good enough for that. And only years later, I realised that I was overcoming institutionalisation. So, it's really deeply affected me that I left the course because I really loved the course

Focus Group Participant

"And I started having these, what I understand, I understood years later, as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, after the Direct Provision trying to adjust to normal life"

Focus Group Participant

"I remember crying the whole night on the first day that they seemed as because there was nothing that I could see that could motivate me to live"

Focus Group Participant

A respondent from the survey who stayed in the Direct Provision wrote so vividly:

"While in Direct Provision for 6 years, I was not allowed to study or work. My life was put on pause. After the Direct Provision I studied for 6 years to become job-ready. It set me back for many years, as well as impacted my mental health. No one will be able to give me back the years I lost"

Survey Participant

Another often cited problem with the Direct Provision centres by participants who had managed to access education, was the issue of sharing rooms with total strangers who had no interest in studying or keeping the room conducive for studying. One participant explained;

"When you are in DP (Direct Provision), you are not sleeping there alone, as we all know, so, you can't read until somebody sleeps. And before that person will sleep, it could be 12, it could be 11. And he would still be playing song and making noise, you cannot say anything. So that was one of the few things challenges was very, very difficult at that moment"

Focus Group Participant

"There is three more families in the house. And when I, you know, enter the kitchen, it's full of mess. And I just start crying in front of the housekeeper. I said, 'this is the room where we need to… for people to stay?'. And she said, 'Yes'. I say, 'but I can't, I can't live like this"

Focus Group Participant

There were other stories about Direct Provision centre management locking gates and not allowing people leave for classes, and where they were left with no choice but to jump over high gates and fences in order to attend college.

> ***"I explained to the manager that I have some days I have to go very early so I can catch the 9 O'clock class. 'You know we are not open by that time. You might have to jump over the gate'. I thought she was joking. So, the day came, I found the cage locked. I tried calling her. She didn't pick up"***
>
> Focus Group Participant

At the time of writing this report, the Irish Government has released a White Paper to end Direct Provision that is proposing an end to the system by 2024.[135] While this appears to all intents and purposes a very welcome development and a pathway out of this abhorrent system, nevertheless we acknowledge the concerns expressed by organisations such as MASI around issues such as the 'four-months stay in a reception centre',[136] Nasc Migrant and Refugee Rights regarding the backlogs in the status determination process, [137] and in particular the concerns of the Irish Refugee Council regarding; 'permission to remain' for people two or more years in the system, the timeframe of implementation, and whether the government has the experience to drive this forward without an arms-length body in place.[138]

It is beyond the scope of this research to contribute intelligibly to the discussion on the White Paper, but we do hope that the testimonies from our participants regarding the pain, trauma and frustrations visited on them as a direct result of the Direct Provision system, will help support recommendations and solutions regarding how best to support people rebuild their lives through education. Certainly, research has shown that the effect of the Direct Provision system lingers for many years after people have left the system.[139] The privatisation of the Direct Provision system coupled with the remote rural locations and the active silencing of residents have compounded the invisibility of a system on a par with Ireland's legacy of Industrial Schools, Mother and Baby Homes, and Magdalene Laundries.[140] Testimony from this research will hopefully contribute to public discourse and understanding of the human casualty resulting from the Direct Provision system.

135 Government of Ireland (2021). A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7aad0-minister-ogorman-publishes-the-white-paper-on-ending-direct-provision/
136 https://www.masi.ie/2021/02/26/statement-on-white-paper-to-end-direct-provision/
137 https://nascireland.org/news/2021/nasc-welcomes-publication-white-paper-ending-direct-provision
138 https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/news/irish-refugee-council-welcome-white-paper
139 Ní Raghallaigh, Foreman, & Feeley, (2016) Transition from Direct Provision to Life in the Community. Irish Research Council.
140 Murphy, F. 2021. "Direct Provision, Rights and Everyday Life for Asylum Seekers in Ireland during COVID-19" Soc. Sci. 10, no. 4: 140. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10040140

5.2.6 STIGMA, STIGMATISATION, RACISM AND LACK OF CULTURAL AWARENESS

"As a Muslim woman she dressed different, many students bullied her and assaulted her because she wore veil. After moving to another city, she decided not to go to school. She has a silent hobby, she takes photos, but one day she will study Law and Human Rights"

Focus Group Participant

For highly educated refugee professionals who flee their countries, gaining a university qualification is one of the key strategies which can be used to re-establish a professional identity.[141] Yet participants in our research spoke about being stigmatised because of their religion, race, background, or refugee status. Many also reported feeling shame and discomfort when out and about in public and consequently tried as much as possible to conceal their identity. One participant described how the moment they disclosed their legal status in an interview, they observed the countenance of the interviewers changing and they were denied the course they were applying to.

"The way that people, the attitudes towards me, after learning that I'm coming from Direct Provision. It was really so embarrassing to see that people have high education, and the way they treated me"

Focus Group Participant

"It's not just being a person of different colour, that in itself is one thing, but then to be the person of different colour who also is an asylum seeker. That's stigma"

Focus Group Participant

141 Morrice, Linda (2013) Refugees in Higher Education: Boundaries of belonging and recognition, stigma and exclusion. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 32 (5). pp. 652-668. ISSN 0260-1370

Linda Morrice presents very interesting findings in line with what our participants shared, about the impact that the stigmatisation of refugees has on people's ability to access or to progress within higher education, including experiencing anxiety, insecurity and feeling out of place.[142]

> *"When I went to university, it wasn't easy, because you cannot mingle with the people. The fact is that everybody want to know where you live. And we are limiting ourselves"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Several participants who had gained access to higher education narrated how they isolated themselves in order not to be seen as poor or different. Another described how they had sat in a class where both the lecturers and the students engaged in a discussion about refugees and people seeking asylum, passing comment the participant deemed derogatory and inaccurate. The class was not aware of the participant's status, but the discussion further caused feelings of exclusion. In fact, participants often cited feeling that they did not belong, often as a result of poverty and shame regarding Direct Provision.

> *"When it comes to inclusion, it was very, very difficult because you know, majority of the people want to know where you from and where you are, and all that"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"When they call me that it's lunchtime, 'let's go', I hide myself. The reason being that I only take the 19euro every week …So all that I do with that money, I go and buy wedges…and the wedges I have to have them secretly and go hide somewhere, not because I don't want to be with them. I had no option but to hide myself because I don't have what it takes. I go to school bare stomach, no food"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Participants also spoke about being stereotyped on various other levels. One focus group participant narrated how her fluency in English was a surprise to an academic interviewer who was 'shocked' to hear an African speak 'good' English.

142 Morrice, Linda (2013) Refugees in Higher Education: Boundaries of belonging and recognition, stigma and exclusion. International Journal of Lifelong Education. 32 (5). pp. 652-668. ISSN 0260-1370

"The impression that most people here have is that people that come from the African countries, they are not good in English, and they are less educated. So, she was shocked to hear that I was good in English. I was good in everything that she was asking me. So, she said, 'I'm really happy. And I think we're going to offer you the placement going to get back to you as soon as possible"

Focus Group Participant

"I found myself being looked down upon…the stereotype…it looked like everybody was being painted with the same brush and they did not expect you to be above a certain standard"

Focus Group Participant

Research has shown that a feeling of belonging is vital for student engagement and success,[143] yet for programme refugees like resettled Syrians, this is probably most challenging of all in terms of stereotyping. As evidenced by the quote at the beginning of this section, our education systems, often thought of as being catalysts of progressive knowledge and spaces for critical reflection are not exempt from harbouring, maintaining, and shielding Islamophobia in its many forms.[144]

"She likes to study but she has had bad experience of going to school in Ireland where she had been bullied, she felt weak and disable because she could not defend herself because she could not speak English yet"

Focus Group Participant

"I know they are just kids, and they did not mean to hurt me"

Focus Group Participant

143 Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C. & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling identities in refugees learning through open, online higher education. DCU: Ireland

144 Akel, S. (2021). Institutionalised - The Rise of Islamophobia in Higher Education. Centre for Equity and Inclusion: London Metropolitan University.

Conversations with the Syrian community who partook in this research, indicated a fear of becoming involved in Irish society as a result of Islamophobia, and a lack of awareness at all levels of Irish society about Arabic culture. Microaggressions can range from seemingly innocent, yet highly loaded questions, to aggressive comments and demands, that over time can chip away at the person on the receiving end of what can feel like a continuous onslaught of commentary, othering, and vocalised prejudices.[145]

> *"I mean if she's afraid to go to the salon to get her eyebrows, how she can go in the university?"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"My Irish friend has in his mind that everybody coming from the East is coming from the desert only with camels and tents"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Research has highlighted how this 'othering' is endemic in society from a young age, particularly in a recent report exploring the experiences of young refugees, where local Irish young people were resistant to having Syrian young people join the group and held very stereotypical views on Syrian youth.[146] In terms of in higher education institutions, as there is little or no anti-racist training in secondary education, students arrive at university never having been challenged regarding their assumptions and behaviours concerning greater diversity in Irish society.[147]

Our research documents misconceptions and stigmatisation of refugees, incorrect stereotyping of peoples' countries of origin as somehow uncultured or backward, and an almost blanket belief that refugees are in Ireland due to famine or starvation.

> *"The manager told me 'oh you people you are coming here, you're complaining. We give you food you give you a place'. He thought what brought us here was hunger"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

145 Akel, S. (2021). Institutionalised - The Rise of Islamophobia in Higher Education. Centre for Equity and Inclusion: London Metropolitan University.

146 Children's Rights Alliance (2019). Safe Haven - The Needs of Refugee Children Arriving in Ireland through the Irish Refugee Protection Programme: An Exploratory Study. Available at: https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/Safe%20Haven%20Main%20Report.pdf

147 Sheridan, V.. (2021). Counter stories: life experiences of refugee background mature students in higher education in Ireland. Race Ethnicity and Education. 1-18. 10.1080/13613324.2021.1890559

> *"A huge misconception with the Irish people and asylum seekers…'Oh, you get free food, you get free bed, you get money, you get social', but they fail to realise and perhaps they're not at fault… or maybe they are for actually not wanting to know better, they don't realise that most nobody wishes to remain inside the system. Sleep eat repeat all the time. Because I've actually had two friends who got so depressed from having nothing to do…suicide"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

The lack of cultural awareness in relation to refugees was not just pertinent to the general public, as some participants also highlighted a lack of awareness with university staff about the status, struggles and sometimes even the very existence of refugees and people seeking asylum.

> *"And they didn't understand my situation because they never knew of Direct Provision"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"And he didn't know what I'm talking about…to live in Direct Provision. He didn't know. I mean, he had no clue"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

One participant spoke of how they defied all odds to get to one of the universities for an interview, and the interviewer, clearly unaware of the difficulties and hurdles people seeking asylum face in coming forward for such things; transport, childcare, food etc, flippantly told her to come back on another day once she had found out whether or not she was eligible to study because of her legal status. The participant of course could not return

> *"Okay, I will give you back your documents, and you go home and find out if you're eligible to study'. And I just went home, I didn't go back there. Because it took me hours of thinking and days to get the courage to go to that place"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Another participant, currently in university, described a lecture that debated the issue of people seeking asylum and refugees, that they felt unable to be a part of, and that they experienced as being deprecating towards people in the Direct Provision system.

> *"the kind of questions and things brought me down because some people…positive people…have negative…you know, I kept quiet. But that was…that really got to me. I was nice with people, but I couldn't open up"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"And that people in the colleges, like the administration, is not sensitised to the problems of asylum seekers, they are more rigid…"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Research has shown that people with third-level qualifications appear more positive towards minorities in Ireland and elsewhere, however, this is largely because highly educated people tend to conceal their negative attitudes.[148] In terms of fostering true interculturalism and diversity, efforts are therefore needed to combat more subtle, covert, or coded forms of prejudice and discrimination within our society.[149] The temptation to ignore the uncomfortable fact of the presence of racisms in HEIs would be disingenuous as it turns away from its systemic aspect, evident not only in an institutional but also in the wider social context.[150]

5.2.7 BLANKET LOWER LEVEL QQI COURSES AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

> *"I knew the level that they were trying to offer me was much below, what they wanted to offer me was at a level 3 or level 4. And that became very, very hard for me to accept because I thought, 'Listen, I've done things like fundamentals of calculus, mathematics, engineering, stuff like that. And I'm coming to be given a level 3 course, maybe level 2 literacy course. I am going to be taught English again. It became very, very hard for me"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

148 McGinnity, F., Creighton, M & Fahey, E. (2020). Hidden Versus Revealed Attitudes: A List Experiment on Support for Minorities in Ireland. Available from: https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/Hidden-Vs-Revealed-Attitudes-Report-IHREC-ESRI-July-2020-1.pdf

149 Ibid

150 Sheridan, V. (2021). Counter stories: life experiences of refugee background mature students in higher education in Ireland. Race Ethnicity and Education. 1-18. 10.1080/13613324.2021.1890559.

Participants in this research reported that people seeking asylum in Direct Provision centres were not allowed to access courses at a higher level than QQI Level 3 or 4 irrespective of what prior qualifications they had obtained from their countries of origin.

> *"At the end of the interview and she told me that, oh, because I'm an asylum seeker I can do like a course that doesn't exceed Level 3. And I said, 'Really?' She told me 'Yeah'. Because I'm an asylum seeker. 'So, I can't do even level four?'. I said, 'Wow'"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Participants admitted to enrolling on courses at a significantly lower educational level, just to stay engaged. Some participants, however, refused to attend those courses and chose to remain without any formal education while in the centres. This is one of the barriers that is peculiar to residents of Direct Provision centres, and certainly is part of the cycle of 'othering' and stigmatisation as highlighted in the previous section.

> *"What I noticed is that not everybody was actually willing to sacrifice and take what was there on the table. So, I made a choice that I was going to take it I was going to go and do the level 3. And then along the way, when we're doing level 3, the teachers they were very nice, very, very nice ladies, they could tell that this person maybe his academic level is far beyond what we offered him"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"Like most of us are already graduates before coming to Ireland. Then you come into the course they have for asylum seekers, to where you go back to start learning how to write ABC, or to learn how to use your nouns and pronouns. It makes people sit back in the hostel and be doing nothing"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

A barrier that was often discussed by participants was their inability to get their previous qualifications from their country of origin recognised. The raising of this barrier in focus groups, prompted our asking the question explicitly in the survey. The response was more glaring in the survey, where of the 40% of respondents who had a university qualification from their country of origin, only 21.7% of these had been able to have the qualification recognised in Ireland.

> *"I finished the high degree as one of those best students. They start like the war, so we literally had to pack-up what you could and run away. I tried to translate the diploma here and try to move on. The guy, who was the director…it was the first time he saw a person with this degree"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

One participant, with a medical qualification, relayed how the only way to access education was to attend Level 5 courses in whatever area was available, since the degree was not recognised.

Related to this barrier, is one that was raised by refugees who had fled their country as a result of war. This cohort of participants spoke about being asked for their educational certificates or their passports prior to being allowed to access education. There was a sense of real frustration as these participants had fled their home countries under the most dangerous and extreme circumstances and in many instance were not in possession of their degree certificates or passports.

> *"I tried to register my qualifications here, but I couldn't because I didn't have a passport"*
>
> Survey Participant

> *"People who came from war I mean, you can't bring your documents when you want to flee the war. Maybe your documents are just burned. You can't go back to a government or university and say, 'Oh, please, I just need that specific paper'…"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Some participants were not only able to have their qualifications recognised but could also not access financial supports because of said qualification in a double jeopardy type scenario.

> *"I didn't receive any grants for the courses that I did because I already had Masters degree. And I felt that it was absolutely unfair because the system had deskilled me purposely"*
>
> Survey Participant

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) has long been seen as a means of expanding migrants and indigenous groups' opportunities, opening up new educational pathways without having to gain pre-requisite entry requirements.[151] According to some research, RPL provides a mechanism to recognise the skills of immigrants,[152] yet it would appear that the reality on the ground is far more complex.

> *"I had a guy who contacted me …and he had done five years of Veterinary Medicine in his country. And he had one year left, which was a practical year. They went through every single module trying to match it up to the degree here. They couldn't really figure out where he would slot in in Ireland. He had to start again. But he would get no funding"*
>
> Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

The Higher Education Authority's Human Capital Initiative is committed to delivering on a National Recognition of Prior Learning across 19 HEIs over the next four years.[153] It has yet to be seen whether RPL for refugees and migrants will be part of that discussion. Certainly, at very least, if a qualification from a refugee's country of origin has not been recognised in Ireland, then funding grants for HE should be made available.

5.2.8 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

> *"So, she was walking in the street, and she saw this childish book she knows that this book is for children, but she doesn't mind to buy it because she wanted to practice English and to learn English"*
>
> Focus group participant (translated)

Refugees and international protection applicants in Ireland who cannot speak English immediately encounter a barrier. Nevertheless, it is a reflection of the increased presence of foreign languages in Ireland, that questions on languages now form part of the Census.[154]

151 Finn, J. (2019). Re-cognising RPL – A Deleuzian enquiry into policy and practice of Recognition of Prior Learning. Maynooth University: Maynooth.

152 Goggin, D., O'Leary, P & Sheridan, I. (2017). Recognition of Prior Learning in Irish Further Education and Training. QQI and ETBI Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Prior%20Learning%20Report.pdf

153 https://www.iua.ie/ourwork/learning-teaching/recognition-of-prior-learning-and-lifelong-learning-in-higher-education-project/

154 Immigrant Council of Ireland. (2017). Language and Migration in Ireland. Available from: https://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/files/Language%20and%20Migration%20in%20Ireland.pdf

Participants in this research, who had graduate qualifications in their home countries, described having first to learn English before they could proceed with education in any shape of form in Ireland.

> *"They just arrived very recently, and they can't plan for anything before learning English. She herself wants to work and be independent, but she knows she needs to study…but before she has to learn English"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Some participants reported feeling that their lack of English was equated to illiteracy. They reported being treated as though their lack of English overruled their qualifications from their home country.

> *"The second part is that oftentimes, when English is not your first language, and you're trying to communicate to the person on the front desk, Well, okay, I want to study this. There is not usually but sometimes this assumption that if English is not your first language, then probably your past academic experience suddenly ceases to matter"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Participants often felt ignored and dehumanised, not just in terms of education but also in relation to being able to advocate for their legal status as a result of not having proficiency in the English language.

> *"I saw her face changing. And I thought, now your face is changing, because you see me as a human. When I am allowed to share my story, and I have the words to tell the story, you start seeing me as a human, but before that, before I can say any word, and you are questioning me, I am nothing to you"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

The quality of tuition of English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL), varies wildly from centre to centre, with some centres using qualified ESOL teachers with literacy backgrounds, and others using teachers with no ESOL background and sticking rigidly to QQI standard English modules deemed culturally unsuitable in the context of teaching refugees.[155] One of the authors of this report has personally witnessed ESOL classes at Level 4 being delivered to refugees in Dublin focused on language and terminology for package holidays such as 'sun-cream' and 'cocktail' and 'what to pack for a sun holiday', and when she highlighted the inapprpriacy of this with the course manager in the college in 2019, was met with defensiveness and justification. In fact, research has identified that there is an urgent need to identify and develop materials, resources, and classroom procedures more appropriate to refugees and which take account of previous learning experience and preference, as well as particular circumstances and objectives.[156]

5.2.9 TRANSPORT AND TRANSFER OF PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM TO NEW DIRECT PROVISION CENTRES

> *"You could see it was meant to be isolated, so it's not where the regular bus service would go through. The refugee centre to the college is about an hour's walk. The road would be dark. It could be raining sometimes"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Under current arrangements, people seeking asylum do not have a say in which Direct Provision centres they are sent to. Applications for transfer to other centres are also often not entertained.[157] The Ombudsman has denied the not granting of education transfer requests to those who want to avail of them[158]. However, participants in this research spoke about being transferred arbitrarily from a Direct Provision located near their university to one far away, or of the difficulty in trying to relocate to a Direct Provision centre closer to their education provider.

> *"However, within that course I had to move to X and because that spot that I had was so precious, I knew I couldn't get any other….. Meanwhile, when I was doing that course, I had to be travelling every day, from X to Y"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

155 Ćatibušić, B., Gallagher, F. & Karazi, S. (2019). An investigation of ESOL provision for adult Syrian refugees in Ireland: voices of support providers. In: Mishan, Freda, (ed.) *ESOL Provision in the UK and Ireland: Challenges and Opportunities. Language, Migration and Identity*, 2. Peter Lang Ltd, Oxford, UK. ISBN 978-1-78874-373-0

156 Ibid p.16

157 Irish Refugee Council, 2019

158 Ombudsman, 'The Ombudsman & Direct Provision: Update for 2019', April 2019, available at: https://bit.ly/2Xku2Dr.

> *"I was transferred to X and there's a Direct Provision centre there, and there's a college as well, but they strictly specified that they do not take asylum seekers"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

In the recently published White Paper,[159] the government has proposed that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth will facilitate eligible third-level students to be accommodated in locations convenient to their HEIs, where possible. While it is unclear the extent to which the words 'where possible' will work as an exclusionary phrase, it is hoped that the changes the White Paper proposes will serve to remove this barrier.

Regardless, the issue of transport to and from school, university, and college, was highlighted almost universally by participants in this project as well as with stakeholders.

> *"The bill for the Leap Cards used to be massive"*
>
> Stakeholder Participant

People seeking asylum in Ireland are not allowed to apply for driving licences, and as many Direct Provision centres are based in remote or rural locations, this has a profound impact on peoples' ability to attend education. Despite numerous challenges from a Human Rights perspective, Ireland has so far held fast to the view that people seeking asylum are not 'normally resident' here, and therefore not permitted to drive.[160] The White Paper on Ending Direct Provision committed to introducing legislation before summer 2021 which would allow international protection applicants to apply for driving permits.[161] Not soon enough for participants in this study, who have been impacted by this ruling to dangerous proportions.

> *"The road would be dark as wintertime it doesn't get bright until about 8.30 or 9 most times. So, I'd have to make sure I'm keeping myself safe walking to college"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

159 Government of Ireland (2021). A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7aad0-minister-ogorman-publishes-the-white-paper-on-ending-direct-provision/

160 https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/high-court/high-court-upholds-refusal-of-learner-driver-s-permit-for-asylum-seekers-1.4521269

161 https://nascireland.org/news/2021/driving-licences-asylum-seekers#:~:text=Asylum%20seekers%20in%20Ireland%20are%20not%20allowed%20to%20apply%20for%20driving%20licences.&text=In%20-September%202018%2C%20then%2DMinister,other%20matters%20had%20been%20resolved%E2%80%9D.

> *"Imagine going back home in the darkness in those narrow roads… in a cold winter. It was a sacrifice that most of us had to take just to find fulfilment of living because without that education, we'll never feel the fulfilment of living"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"Every day, I ride a cycle on that road where a car can just hit you and kill you"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Worryingly, and as Ireland has seen with the Traveller community who were subjected to decades of exclusionary policy making,[162] policies such as these; specifically designed to exclude certain groups from society, can have profound impact in terms of compounding racism and stigmatisation for generations. By creating structural barriers to integration and opportunity for some but not for others, these policies determine who is ultimately defined as educated, middle-class, poor, or a criminal, and define who is deserving and who is not, who is welcome and who is not.[163]

5.2.10 CHILDCARE

A 2019 report cites Ireland as the third most expensive country in Europe for childcare.[164] Coupled with the financial barriers that refugees and people in the protection process encounter, it was not surprising that participants with children described not being able to afford childcare costs, nor of having the requisite cultural or social capital to be able to get help to mind their children while they studied.

> *"And as a mother of many children, I cannot just leave them go to attend the lecture. Because X (train timetable) has a schedule that you cannot come back"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

162 Irish Traveller Movement. (2017). Review of the Commission on Itinerancy Report. [Online] Available at: https://itmtrav.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ITM-Review-of-the-1963-Commission-on-Itinerancy.pdf

163 Perreira, K. M., & Pedroza, J. M. (2019). Policies of Exclusion: Implications for the Health of Immigrants and Their Children. Annual review of public health, 40, 147–166. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040218-044115

164 Eurydice Report https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/key-data-early-childhood-education-and-care-europe-%E2%80%93-2019-edition_en

> *"the other barrier I had when I was in the hostel, going to school, was getting a minder to take care of my children, because the management is specifically concerned about those things"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"And trusting people, to collect my children to drop them home, or to have them in their houses. You know, later on, I found out, like years later, that my daughter was bullied by her best friend. And her mother was the one who would encourage the bullying"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Previous research with migrant women has highlighted how the lack of affordable and accessible childcare is seen as major barrier to social integration, as it limits opportunities for employment, education, and increases social isolation[165].

> *"She's a very busy mom now, but meanwhile she's studying English so maybe in the future she will have her own plans"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Affordable, accessible childcare has been emphasised as essential for migrant women as it significantly impacts their ability to participate in education and employment.[166]

165 AKIDWA. (2020). Let's Talk: Mental Health Experiences of Migrant Women. AKIDWA: Dublin.
166 Ibid

5.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the unanimous accession to the benefits education brings first to the individual and then the community, research continues to show a huge amount of frustration and challenges experienced by International Protection applicants and refugees especially when trying to access education in this country.[167] Irish government policies, coupled with limits around financial and language learning resources, actively serve to reduce the possibilities for refugees and people in the protection process to participate in higher education.[168] The constraints on meaningful access to higher education for people seeking asylum and refugees have serious implications in terms of social integration and access to the labour market,[169] as well as the mental health repercussions from enforced idleness.[170] Learning new skills and upgrading existing skills is seen as vital, even while waiting in the protection process,[171] to support refugees' and asylum seekers' post-migratory mental health[172].

167 Ní Raghallaigh, Dr. M., Foreman, M., Feeley, M., Moyo, S., Wenyi Mendes, G. & Bairéad, C. (2016). *Transition: from Direct Provision to life in the community*. Dublin: Irish Refugee Council.

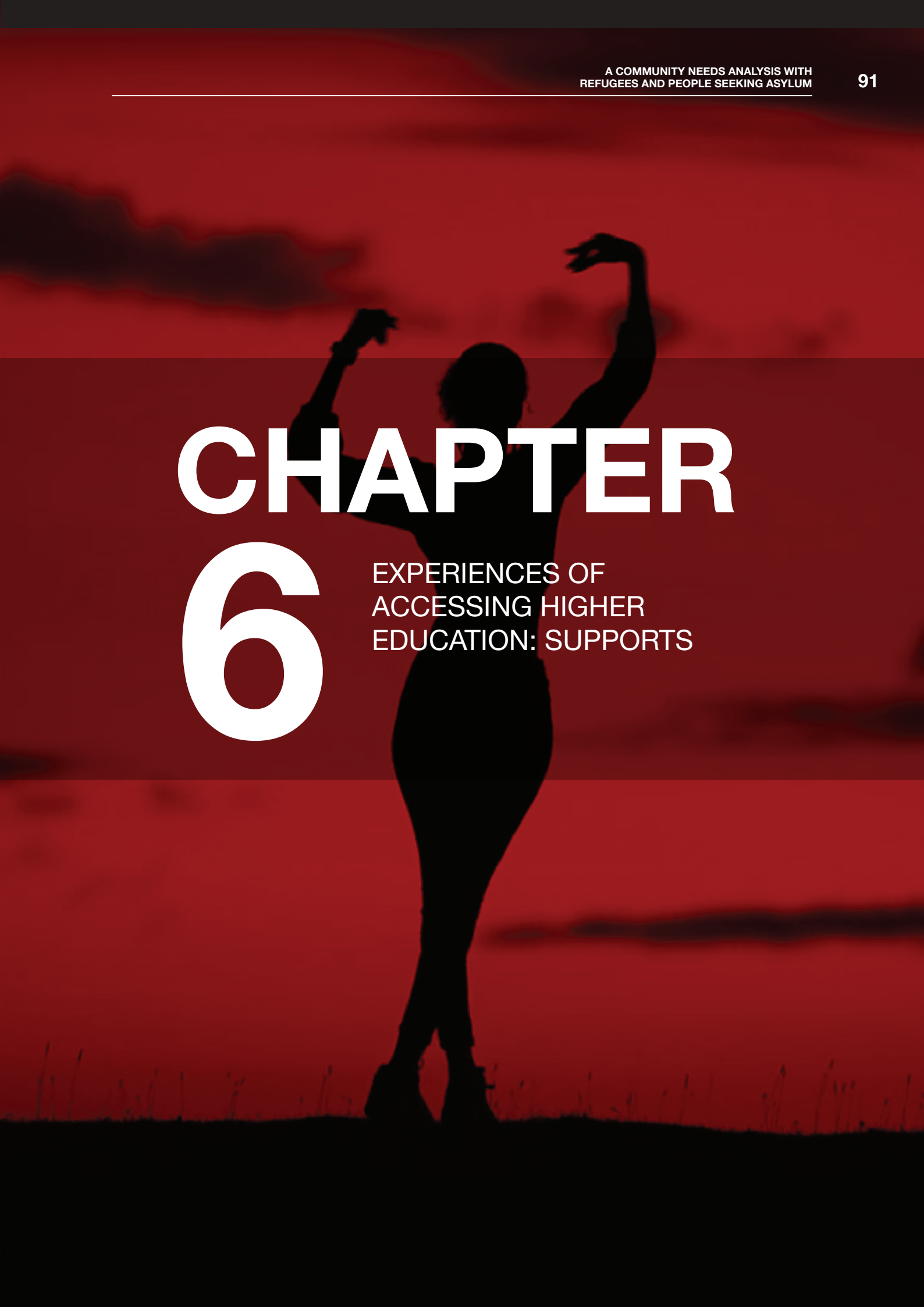
168 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. de Wit (Eds.), *Refugees and higher education: Transnational perspectives on access, equity and internationalization* (pp. 161–177). BrillSense. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012

169 Ibid

170 Doras. (2020). Mental Health and Direct Provision: *Recommendations for Addressing Urgent Concerns*. Available at: https://doras.org/doras-report-highlights-urgent-need-for-better-mental-health-services-in-direct-provision-centres/

171 AKIDWA. (2020). *Let's Talk: Mental Health Experiences of Migrant Women*. AKIDWA: Dublin.

172 Murphy, R., Keogh, B., Higgins, A. (2019). Erosion of Meaning in Life: African Asylum Seekers' Experiences of Seeking Asylum in Ireland. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey027



CHAPTER 6

EXPERIENCES OF ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION: SUPPORTS

6. EXPERIENCES OF ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION; SUPPORTS

> *"I am really lucky that I had, that I have in my life, people who were able to help me, you know, my friends and my family. And everyone chipped in and paid for the course. And so, I was able to succeed with that course. And then I went on doing Masters"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

6.1 INTRODUCTION TO SUPPORTS REGARDING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

As has been highlighted in the previous chapter, the structural barriers and limited rights to higher education pose considerable challenges for refugees and people in the protection process in terms of access. In this chapter, we will highlight the supports that some respondents were able to avail of that enabled them to progress on their educational journeys. The information gathered from both the focus group discussions and the survey responses were similar –*Not-For-Profit Organisations* (supports ranging from financial support to counselling and mental health); *University of Sanctuary* (which came about in an attempt to block the logjam of refugees and people seeking asylum who wished, but were unable, to access HE); *SUSI* (for those eligible)[173], *Springboard; Free Access course, Specific Departments/individuals* in educational institutions, and the contributions and *kindness of friends and strangers* (as highlighted in the quote at the beginning of this chapter), were the main supports listed by participants. In this section, we will describe some of these services and supports as identified by participants and describe how this support was experienced or perceived. 24% of survey participants claimed to have received no support.

6.2 NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

By far the support most often referred to by participants as providing financial and other support to their accessing education was Not-for-Profit organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council, Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project, and St Vincent De Paul. Over 30% of survey respondents listed one of these organisations as their primary source of support in accessing higher education.

173 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.

One of the not-for-profits most frequently listed by participants as a source of support was The Irish Refugee Council.

The Irish Refugee Council is an NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) whose core aims "*… are to make sure that the asylum policy and practice in Ireland are in full accordance with international law and ensure the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers*". It also seeks to "*promote awareness and understanding of the issues facing refugee and asylum seekers in Ireland*".[174]

A precursory reading of the aims of the IRC does not begin to give even a peek of the enormity of its impact in the lives of participants in this research. One peer-researcher during one of the reflective sessions after the completion of the research described the IRC as a place that they had come to think of as '**Grandma's house**' – a place where they could run to and feel safe.

Participants highlighted that the IRC supported their access to education by either providing fees, or for some, helping with transportation.

> ***"I can't find words to express how to thank because, listen, it has opened up doors…a lot of people and a lot of other organisations will not do what the Irish Refugee Council will do in trying to raise funds for people that are marginalised out there to access education"***
>
> Focus Group Participant

> ***"Irish Refugee Council, the way they treated us, and listen, they change the whole situation, they change the whole matrix and that if a lot of people know about that…"***
>
> Focus Group Participant

174 Irish Refugee Council *Retrieved 25 June 2021*.

> *"Because I think Irish Refugee Council is very, very helpful in that way. But I only realized about that organisation maybe after a year being here"*
>
> Survey Participant

Since 2015, the Irish Refugee Council offer an education fund that provides grants to students allowing them to access university, as well as supporting the development of scholarship schemes in universities, and advocating on behalf of individuals. The fund is financed through a mixture of donations and fund-raising, and every cent raised goes directly to students. The fund is able to provide support on an annual basis to approximately 50-60 students and offer advocacy educational support to the same number again.

> *"It didn't cost us any money, but we got another 60 people in the door, you know, by holding their hand and, you know, arguing with people"* [175]

The IRC typically receive applications for education funding from upwards of 200 applicants a year and receive requests for information regarding education from approximately 500 potential students a year.

DUNLAOGHAIRE REFUGEE PROJECT (DRP)

Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project (DRP) was also frequently referred to as providing support to participants in their quest to access education and were referred to explicitly by 18 survey participants as the primary source of educational support to access HE. DRP started in 2001 as an informal gathering of people who met to consider how to provide assistance to refugees and people seeking asylum who were living in the area. '*Originally dealing with unaccompanied minors, because at that point there was no system*,'[176] today, it has metamorphosed to a registered charity who *'offer advice, practical and emotional support, a shoulder to cry on, friendship, information and guidance at our Drop-in Centre in Dún Laoghaire*.'[177]

175 Focus group with stakeholders regarding supports April 2021
176 Focus group on HE supports with stakeholders
177 http://drp.ie/about.html

The charity continues to provide support for separated children and former separated children seeking asylum, through a drop-in centre in Dún Laoghaire each Monday evening, as well as partnering with schools and colleges to enrol children and young people in schools and language classes. Relying entirely on philanthropic donation, the DRP manages to fund between 20 and 30 people each year to access education, the vast majority of which is spent on transport.

> *"We used to say it cost us about 1000 a year to fund a person. The majority of that between seven and 800 was ridiculously on transport. This year, we are very much in the black because we haven't spent that much on those"*

Participants in the research – both in the focus group and in the survey often mentioned the support they received from the DRP. Supports ranged from money for food and transportation to providing valuable advice and information.

> *"Fortunately, I came across the Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project. I applied for help … and they helped me"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"I applied for fees, fees help from the Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project, and they helped me, and I finished to do that course"*
>
> Survey Participant

> *"the Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project because they not only helped with fees at some point, but they linked me with different contacts as well"*
>
> Survey Participant

ST VINCENT DE PAUL (SVP)

SVP is an International Christian Voluntary membership organization whose goal is to fight poverty by providing practical assistance to people in need. Survey participants listed the charity, whose focus is on a practical approach to dealing with poverty, through working primarily in person-to-person contact,[178] as a support in terms of providing transport, food or clothes.

> *"I even went to St. Vincent De Paul. That time they didn't help me. But at a later stage, they helped me I'm so thankful for them. They helped me with transport"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

6.3 UNIVERSITY OF SANCTUARY

The Universities of Sanctuary (UoS) initiative is made up of a network of universities committed to welcoming those seeking sanctuary into their communities and to providing a safe place within which they can pursue their educational goals.[179] Essentially what the universities in Ireland have achieved, is to stop classifying refugees who are successful in obtaining a University of Sanctuary Scholarship as oversees or international students, and instead charge no fees and offer additional supports.[180]

Universities of Sanctuary is an initiative of the City of Sanctuary movement which began in October 2005 in Sheffield, U. K.[181] Dublin City University (DCU) was designated as Ireland's first UoS in December 2016 in recognition of a range of initiatives demonstrating commitment to welcoming people seeking asylum and refugees into the university community,[182] and Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), achieved College of Sanctuary status in 2017, becoming the first college in Ireland to do so.

178 https://www.svp.ie/about-us.aspx
179 Universities of Sanctuary (2019). Universities of Sanctuary. Retrieved from https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org/
180 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D., Byne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland. In L. Unangst, H. Ergin, A. Khajarian, T. DeLaquil, & H. d. Wit, Refugees and Higher Education (pp. 161-177). Netherlands: Brill| Sense.
181 https://www.iua.ie/ouruniversities/universities-of-sanctuary/
182 Ibid

In early 2021, Trinity College Dublin became Ireland's seventh UoS, bringing the total to eight HEIs designated as having sanctuary status.

Sanctuary status is awarded by Places of Sanctuary Ireland (PoSI), an organisation linked to the City of Sanctuary Movement, that supports efforts in Ireland to build a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary. Institutions need to follow three main principles to be eligible for sanctuary status;

1. Learn – e.g., activities that involve training staff, teaching students, or holding events to raise awareness on what it means to seek sanctuary
2. Take positive action – e.g., offers of places to study, subject to eligibility, through scholarships and similar supportive schemes.
3. Share – e.g., sharing your vision, achievements, what you have learned and your good practice with other education institutions

Universities that attain the UoS status, provide scholarships to refugees and people seeking asylum who meet designated criteria, and the Irish Refugee Council Guide to Education in Ireland,[183] provides the most comprehensive and up to date list of who is providing what in terms of scholarship support on a National level. Considering that almost 20% of our survey participants cited UoS as the support that carried them through higher education, more than twice the number who cited SUSI, the consolidated and 'live' list from the IRC in relation to UoS places is an invaluable resource.

Even though eight higher education institutions (HEIs) have attained UoS status, each university has a varied and limited number of scholarship slots, ranging from one place (Dundalk Institute of Technology, DKIT) to twelve (National University of Ireland, Galway NUIG). DCU, having offered scholarships since 2016, has provided twenty-three awards, including importantly sixteen flexible off-campus programmes to adult learners at both undergraduate and post graduate level,[184] and display huge commitment to the programme in terms of research and public engagement such as Refugee Week and the MELLIE Project (Migrant English Language, Literacy and Intercultural Education).

Despite the scheme's limitations in terms of available places, and in particular available part-time places, participants who were able to avail of the scholarship listed it as a major support

> *"So, to me, I can say I recognise that the University of Sanctuary, and the access programme in X, who really were willing to sponsor me in every way in my academics"*
>
> Survey Participant

183 Irish Refugee Council. (2021-2022). EDUCATION IN IRELAND: A guide for protection applicants, those with refugee status, subsidiary protection or permission to remain. Available at: https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/Listing/Category/education

184 Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C. & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling identities in refugees learning through open, online higher education. DCU: Ireland

> *"then I found out about the scholarship option that X was offering as University of Sanctuary. I managed to win it. And so like, from there it kind of starts everything getting better for me"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"I didn't know about the University of Sanctuary scholarship till that day that I applied, like it was the last day to apply. And surprisingly, they just straight away, you know, you, we accept you and you can like, you know, start in September"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

We hope that this research can contribute to the discussion on how University of Sanctuary scholarship schemes can successfully facilitate participation to and through HE for refugees and people seeking asylum.[185] The process of becoming a UoS can of itself highlight the complexity of the issue of access to third-level education for this cohort, exposing opportunities for better commitment to race equity and broader issues of inclusion and belonging on campus. UoS schemes, while undoubtedly providing vital support, do nevertheless raise the question as to whether they relieve pressure on the Government to radically reform its policies on access to HE for the refugee and protection seeking communities.[186]

6.4 ADVOCACY GROUPS; MASI, UNION OF STUDENTS IRELAND

The Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI) is an independent platform for people seeking asylum to join together in unity and purpose. Established in 2014 after the protests in the Direct Provision centres with management company Aramark (who own Avoca Handweavers) on issues such as living conditions and food, MASI demand the right to work and education, as well as an end to the deportation regime for all in the system. The movement puts pressure on the Government to end the system of Direct Provision and empowers its members through regular meetings and sharing of information as well as through advocacy. MASI were helpful to this research project in terms of; disseminating the participant survey, inviting us to present the research at two of their member meetings, and through their communication and support of the online webinars organised as off-shoots of this research by Community Connector Declan Markey.

185 Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C. & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling identities in refugees learning through open, online higher education. DCU: Ireland

186 Murphy, C. (2020). The University as a Place of Sanctuary: Advocating for Inclusion and Equality for Refugees and Migrants. Available from: http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13821/1/Chapter%20CM.pdf

Several participants in this research listed MASI as a support and mentioned the importance of the advocacy campaigns and the platform as a way to raise awareness about the conditions and even the very existence of people in the protection process.

> *"thanks to the demonstration, and that influencing of MASI in 2014 2015, and I was part of that, the government was pressured…and people came to be aware of how people are living and since then a lot of things have been changing, you know, a lot of things and, and a lot of organisations have been engaging, you know, there seemed to be knowledge and awareness of the existence of the people in Direct Provision"*
>
> Survey Participant

Others mentioned how the information and encouragement to move out and on from the system came from organisations such as MASI.

> *"Some of the refugee supporting groups… like MASI they really give me a good push to see that I can access education"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Union of Students Ireland (USI) is another organisation working to increase awareness and contribute to the movement for rights for refugees and people in the protection process. In 2018, USI voted to boycott Aramark (mentioned above), who ran catering outlets on campus, for its links to Direct Provision.[187]

The Stand Society (a social justice society for third-level students) together with USI launched the Migrant Minds Matter campaign in November 2020, which seeks justice for students in the protection process. This innovative and eye-catching project is aimed at educating the public about the inequalities rife in the education system with regards to international protection applicants, as well as taking concrete actions to reduce or eliminate the inequalities. The central premise is to facilitate 10,000 students to take one action each to support the building of an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable education experience for people in the protection process.

187 University Times. (2018). USI Votes to Boycott Aramark Over Direct Provision Links. Available at: http://www.universitytimes.ie/2018/11/usi-votes-to-boycott-aramark-for-its-links-with-direct-provision/

Actions include; signing petitions to the Minister of Education, buying the attractive campaign merchandise with proceeds going into bodies like MASI and other advocacy groups, publicising the project on social media to raise awareness about the inequalities, contacting HEIs and requesting additional supports for international protection applicants. So far, there have been 540 actions taken in furtherance of the project.

Participants in this research referred specifically to the advocacy and awareness work being undertaken by Student Unions, and how they contributed to equality for refugees in terms of access to education.

> *"Students unions, they're very, very instrumental in helping"*
>
> Survey Participant

> *"Student bodies…in getting the system to open up and allow people to come in"*
>
> Survey Participant

What was striking in the focus groups in particular, was how important advocating for others from the community was for participants. One participants summed this up succinctly in their Photovoice, which showed a picture of the stairs in a university library.

> *"I want to help the others who are still at the bottom of those stairs so maybe they won't have to go through what I went through"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Another participant said;

> *"What drives me is something that is in my heart that tells me that this is the right thing to do to advocate for other people"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

6.5 SUSI (STUDENT UNIVERSAL SUPPORT IRELAND)

The SUSI grant (Student Universal Support Ireland) is perhaps the most controversial support referred to in this research, as essentially you need to be resident in Ireland for at least three of the last five years and have a Stamp 4 to be eligible for the state grant (SUSI).[188] However, not all persons with a Stamp 4 are eligible, and to paint a picture as to how complicated the eligibility criteria are, the section regarding nationality and eligibility for the Free Fees Initiative specifically with regard to refugees and people seeking asylum on the HEA website runs to just under 2,500 words.[189]

That said, nine participants in our survey cited SUSI as the primary source of supporting them through higher education, and participants in focus groups also mentioned the support, along with the Student Support Scheme, which has seen recent amendments made to its restrictive eligibility criteria,[190] that will surely serve to broaden the cohort of people able to avail of it.

> *"This year I applied for SUSI and hoping that by the grace of God when the results come out I'll come and continue with my studies"*
>
> Survey Participant

> *"I wanted to do a Master's, I applied for SUSI and I got turned down on the on the grounds of nationality, but I know probably I've read somewhere that that policy has since changed"*
>
> Survey Participant

6.6 SUPPORT FROM INDIVIDUALS AND KINDNESS OF FRIENDS AND STRANGERS

Participants also discussed support they received from their peers, individuals who crossed their path, and random acts of kindness from staff in HEIs, FETs, or in their Direct Provision centres. One participant spoke about a Direct Provision centre staff member that noticed them struggling without a computer and kindly loaned one that her child was no longer using.

188 Irish Refugee Council. (2021-2022). EDUCATION IN IRELAND: A guide for protection applicants, those with refugee status, subsidiary protection or permission to remain. Available at: https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/Listing/Category/education

189 https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/course-fees/

190 Gov.ie (2020). Minister Harris announces changes to the Student Support Scheme for people living in irect Provision. Available from: https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/4c832-minister-harris-announces-changes-to-the-student-support-scheme-for-people-living-in-direct-provision/

> *"'I can see you're struggling. Do you have a computer?' I say, 'No, I don't have a computer'. She said,' Listen. My daughter had an old computer which she's no longer using now. She is no longer in college she's finished. Do you think you can use it for the essay?' And she gave me about a week, and she brought that computer"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Other participants spoke about friends in their classrooms in university who noticed they couldn't afford lunch or afford transportation and stepped in to help ease those burdens by buying lunch or driving the participants in their cars without a cost to them.

> *"The friend have a car, so she gave me lift, I just pay her you know, little money"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"A friend of mine actually lent me a bicycle"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Others spoke about people they had met in education centres, who went out of their way to help in whatever way they could, and the difference this had made.

> *"the teachers they were very nice, very nice ladies. So, they made an effort to say okay we're going to request for this school to provide level four and see whether we can facilitate this"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

> *"To my luck I discovered that the ladies that were actually leading on the lifelong learning were very, very nice people"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Some participants managed to get support at a higher level, which helped to change their circumstances.

"Part of the reason why they decided to give me papers is that I wrote this very moving letter to the Minister"

Focus Group Participant

"She just rang me, and she said, 'how passionate you are'. I see in all the emails and you know, I just do it for you because I met you I see your passion and I give you a scholarship and they accept me at the last moment"

Focus Group Participant

Many of the women spoke of relying on friends to help with taking care of their children while they accessed study, and some spoke about obtaining money or interest free loans that enabled them to pay course fees, food, or transport.

"So, I just needed somebody to be with my kids just for one hour. And I was lucky to get one of our friends that was staying with them, which I really appreciated"

Focus Group Participant

"If you need a loan, you can come again, we are here to assist you. So, I really am happy with that they helped me for that side"

Focus Group Participant

6.7 COUNSELLING OR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

"Not because I'm a refugee but that factors into it. I have been seeing a psychiatrist for almost a year now. Our appointment goes… 'Hello, so is the medication ok?'. I try to reply but she is too involved writing my prescription and that's the end of our consultation. I have managed to get in that I would like to see a psychologist due to the trauma I suffered in my country"

Survey Participant

A study by AkiDwa (Akina Dada wa Africa means sisterhood in Swahili); a national network of migrant women living in Ireland, found that migrant women encounter a multitude of traumatic and stressful experiences in their lives prior to migration, during the migration journey, but most particularly in their post-migration lives.[191] To ensure that the offer of asylum does not continue to worsen or add to the significant mental health needs of refugees and people seeking asylum, there have been urgent calls for a coordinated, culturally sensitive, and appropriately resourced response.[192]

As mentioned previously in this report (pp. 43, 44) Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative (Spirasi) is the national Centre for rehabilitation of victims of torture in Ireland. A few participants highlighted the important role Spirasi played in their journey.

> *"I mean I really thought that nobody will help me or capable of helping me. But they did. So, I just wanted to say that about Spirasi"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

Many Spirasi clients have undergone what is referred to as the Triple Trauma Paradigm; the trauma that happened in the country of origin i.e., torture; the trauma of their transit to Ireland i.e., perilous journeys and refugee camp experiences; and the trauma that happens in the host country i.e., the long and arduous asylum process, Direct Provision, cultural shock, and racism.[193] More than one participant mentioned that Spirasi's intervention was the tipping point that brought them back to normalcy. In response to what supported a participant who had been in a Direct Provision Centre for six years, their answer was unambiguous:

> *"Spirasi, they really helped me to be where I am. Because I really went through rough times in life"*
>
> Survey Participant

Others spoke of how the support of the service were instrumental in helping them to persevere through the challenges and to accept their circumstances while staying strong mentally and having the strength and fortitude to overcome them.

191 AKIDWA. (2020). Let's Talk: Mental Health Experiences of Migrant Women. AKIDWA: Dublin.
192 College of Psychiatrists of Ireland (2017, p.6) The Mental Health Service Requirements in Ireland for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants from Conflict Zones, Position Paper. March 2017.
193 Spirasi. (2020). Submission of Spirasi to the advisory group. Available at: http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Spirasi%20Submission%20to%20Advisory%20Group%2013Aug20%20final.pdf/Files/Spirasi%20Submission%20to%20Advisory%20Group%2013Aug20%20final.pdf

"So Spirasi helped me… for the duration of my stay in Direct Provision. I've been visiting them Mentally, they helped me because I knew I had a vision and it frustrated me not to achieve that…the process of my case was so frustrating and disappointing, a lot of mistakes that were done, it made me stay longer. So, I felt like I was in the wrong space a wrong time"

Focus Group Participant

6.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The supports from individuals and organisations highlighted in this chapter are heartwarming, and the impact of something seemingly small in terms of determining the outcome for someone for whom the odds are stacked against, should inspire allies of refugees and people in the protection process to persevere as even seemingly inconsequential items such as a leap card or an act of kindness, can make a difference to someone's future. However, it is also heartbreaking, as equally these 'seemingly inconsequential items' could be enough to derail someone, who has already encountered and survived so much.

As we have seen, the enormous success associated with receiving a University of Sanctuary scholarship, does not preclude someone from experiencing hunger on campus, or of having to walk long distances on dark dangerous roads, or of experiencing racism or stigmatisation and a feeling of 'separateness' despite their inclusion at higher education level, or of needing trauma support in order to be able to function on a daily basis. 24% of survey participants in this research claimed to have received no support in their bid to access education, and had to rely solely on themselves. As long as the policies surrounding refugees in terms of equality to access to higher education are working contrary to the supports, it will continue to be an uphill battle. As highlighted by Susan Mackey, social worker and coordinator of Nasc's Connect Migrant Youth Project, the legislation underpinning SUSI 'gives the Minister the power to determine what nationality criteria he wants to impose. It would be a simple matter of changing the regulations for the Minister to update the policy.'[194]

194 Conneely, A. (2021). Govt urged to widen access to student grants for refugees, migrants. RTE.

DECONSTRUCTED

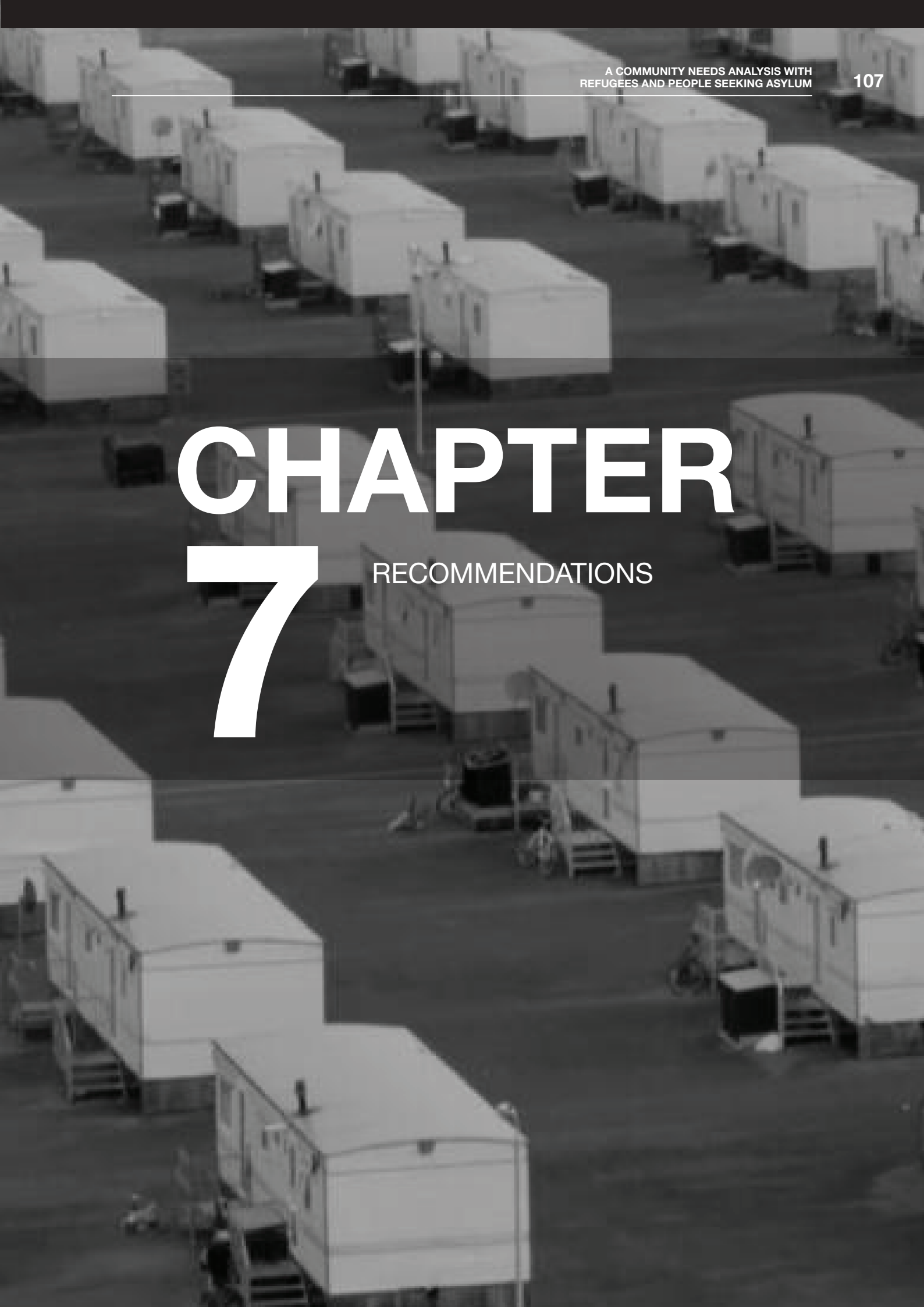
I was reduced to nothing
But you HAVE to rebuild yourself
Then whatever throws you from your country lands you here in a walled-off institute
Hard rocked into a comer you saved your body for... You should be grateful'

When the lonely slowly eats away your mind disabling and disarming mocking
the better future you sought after the better start
the all of the above checklist
You HAVE to you have to rebuild yourself

When you sought asylum with a degree in the bag Masters skills earned and deserved
you will discover how hard it is to hold on to your being when they call your name like that
When they jerk with surprise that you're human
When they sayyou answer to their shock to the notion of origin 'I don't know where to put him'

'This is where you belong, get back
You recall, you remember
This identity has completely taken me over
I REALLY had to rebuild myself

Poem by Felicia Olusanya AKA Felispeaks in response to transcript interviews.



CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

> *"I wonder the university who when they may meet somebody who is very much wanting to study, I mean, what kind of paper will limit that dream?"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study is a participatory peer-led community needs analysis, and as such puts participant voice and opinion front and centre. The recommendations put forward in this chapter come directly from focus group and survey participants, who were asked; 'If you could change one thing to improve access to education for refugees and people in the protection process what would it be?". Participants both in the focus groups and in the survey discussed and highlighted suggested changes that could be made to improve access to higher education for refugees and people in the protection process. Their recommendations, substantiated by literature and/or stakeholder data, are presented below.

7.1.1 REMOVE THE REQUIREMENT OF INTERNATIONAL FEES:

Participants were unanimous in their call to remove the requirement of international fees for people seeking asylum, refugees, and others in the protection process. Universities of Sanctuary have already essentially achieved a stop to classifying refugees living in Ireland as oversees or international students where such students are recipients of the UoS scholarship.[195] The recommendation from this research is that in order to improve access to HE for refugees and international protection applicants, this classification needs to be extended to all refugees regardless of whether they are successful in obtaining a UoS scholarship, so that the issue of being quoted international fees for this cohort to enter HE is relegated to the past.

7.1.2 PROVIDE CLEAR AND CONSISTENT INFORMATION[196]

One of the barriers listed by participants was a lack of adequate, clear, and consistent information about whether they were eligible to undertake a course, and the supports and benefits that could have been of assistance to them once they did manage to access education.

195 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). "Chapter 12 Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland". In Refugees and Higher Education. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012

196 the Irish Research Council produces an Education Information Booklet tailored to this cohort covering themes like: where to access financial support, scholarships and entry routes etc. This booklet is shared with Access Offices in all HEIs, every guidance counsellor in the ETBs, and 150+ contacts in CFEs, as well as 1200+ students who have contacted the IRC.

Participants recommended the coordinated provision of relevant information tailored to refugees and protection applicants. Education rights for refugees, as we have seen, are unprotected due to a highly complex combination of determinants related to forced displacement; demographic, psychological, economic, legal, and sociological; so, there is consequently a lack of awareness about whether 'they' can actually study and how to support 'them' if they do.[197] It was put forward that an information office/liaison officer in HEIs dedicated to providing tailored information to refugees and international protection applicants would be a useful point of contact. Information such as; where to access financial support, University of Sanctuary eligibility requirements and relevant dates, entry routes to universities, and other such information should be strategically prepared and disseminated through this office/dedicated person.

7.1.3 FREE TRANSFER TO/FROM DIRECT PROVISION CENTRES CLOSER TO SCHOOL LOCATIONS/ ACCESS TO TRANSPORT

Participants often highlighted transport as a barrier that arose when they were able to get admission but could not get transferred to Direct Provision centres close to their education provider. To remove this barrier, they suggested that Direct Provision management allow transfers on academic grounds. There were also suggestions that where transfers are not possible, arrangements should be made to provide transportation. The recently released White Paper on Direct Provision,[198] proposes a system that will facilitate eligible third-level students to be accommodated in locations convenient to their third- level institutions, where possible. If this is implemented, it will reduce the hardship caused to people seeking asylum in their bid to access education. Currently in Ireland, people in the protection process are not able to apply for a driving license. The lobbying by organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council regarding the right to a Driver's Licence for People seeking asylum is seeing some progress, as ineligibility for a Driver's Licence is a 'key barrier' for people seeking asylum hoping to work in Ireland,[199] and therefore to accessing education.

7.1.4 ACCESS TO FOOD

Access to food was discussed in every focus group without exception. Participants who were resident in Direct Provision centres often spoke about not having access to food because they left for school before breakfast was served and returned after the last meal was served. Some Direct Provision centres that do not allow self-catering apparently have a rule that people who are absent during dining times cannot have food reserved for them.

197 Speed, F., McCombe, K., Mearns, G. & Chedgzoy, K. (2020). Supporting Sanctuary Students and Staff: Understanding the needs of students and staff from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds. Newcastle University: U.K.

198 Government of Ireland. (2021). A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7aad0-minister-ogorman-publishes-the-white-paper-on-ending-direct-provision/

199 Nick Henderson CEO of the Irish Refugee Council in https://www.thejournal.ie/asylum-seekers-driiver-licenses-4967750-Jan2020/

As a consequence, participants who managed to gain access to university, and who because of financial constraints could not buy food during the day, often stayed without food for long periods of time. This also impacted on participants' children, who were sometimes denied access to food while their parents were in education. In one randomly selected focus group transcript the word 'food' was said 24 times, the word 'bread' was said seven times. Food insecurity plays a critical role in the mental health of refugees and international protection applicants.[200] That so many participants in this study spoke of starving throughout the day while in college and in university, highlights the urgent need on behalf of HEIs to raise awareness amongst staff and across the college community, to ensure that there is no student on campus hungry and without the means/information to support their accessing food.

7.1.5 DO AWAY WITH THE 'THREE-YEAR RULE'

Throughout this research, participants spoke of 'delayed futures', 'life in limbo', and being 'de-skilled' due to 'enforced idleness'. The three-year rule was cited continually as contributing to preventing access to higher education for refugees and in particular international protection applicants. Currently, only refugees and people in the protection process who are not subject to a deportation order and have been habitually resident in the country in the last three years can access third-level education. Participants often cited the hardship that this regulation caused them and called for it to be repealed.

7.1.6 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

One of the barriers that was repeatedly cited, especially in focus groups, was the non-recognition of qualifications. As described in the 'barriers' section, participants described the frustration of not having their qualifications recognised and of taking courses they were overqualified for. At a minimum, it is recommended that in the absence of formal recognition of prior learning, that the applicant should be eligible for undergraduate grant funding. We also concur with other research, that argues for refugees to be formally accounted for with HEIs, as acknowledging the refugee background situates such students in the wider social context of former lived experience which includes among many others; prior education, navigating the asylum process, knowledge pertaining to rebuilding and creating a life in the country of settlement.[201]

7.1.7 PROVIDE CULTURAL AWARENESS & ANTI-RACISM TRAINING

Participants often spoke of the importance of that 'first-person', the first point of contact in a college/HEI, and who was literally the bridge back into education. This CNA has revealed an ongoing need for cultural awareness and anti-racism training in HEIs in order to better prepare staff in our universities to deal respectfully and mindfully with refugees and international protection applicants.

200 AKIDWA. (2020). Let's Talk: Mental Health Experiences of Migrant Women. AKIDWA: Dublin.
201 Sheridan, V. (2021). Counter stories: life experiences of refugee background mature students in higher education in Ireland, Race Ethnicity and Education, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2021.1890559

Specifically, and based on this needs analysis, we agree with UK findings which recommend that communication within universities is improved, so that different departments are aware of issues relating to UoS scholars, refugees and those affected by forced displacement, and incorporate these into Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategies;[202] isolation, poor or no accommodation, food poverty, racism, trauma, mental health issues, financial and geographic barriers.

In terms of racism, Ireland is lagging behind Europe with regard to failing to protect victims of racism and its approach to dealing with hate speech, and is only now enacting legislation it was obliged to endorse more than a decade earlier under Europe's 2008 Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia.[203] Recent research in Ireland has shown that among people with third-level education, over one-quarter conceal negative attitudes to the black ethnic group, and one-fifth mask negativity towards Muslims,[204] further highlighting the importance of anti-racism training in our HEIs.

7.1.8 CREATE AVENUES TO SHARE EXPERIENCE

Promoting success stories of students and academics from refugee backgrounds can not only potentially provide strength to other sanctuary scholars but also work towards raising awareness.[205] Case studies can also be seen as a form of activism, as it is harder to deport or mistreat a person with a name and a recognised social position, rather than one bearing the anonymising and loaded label of 'asylum seeker.'[206]

7.2 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

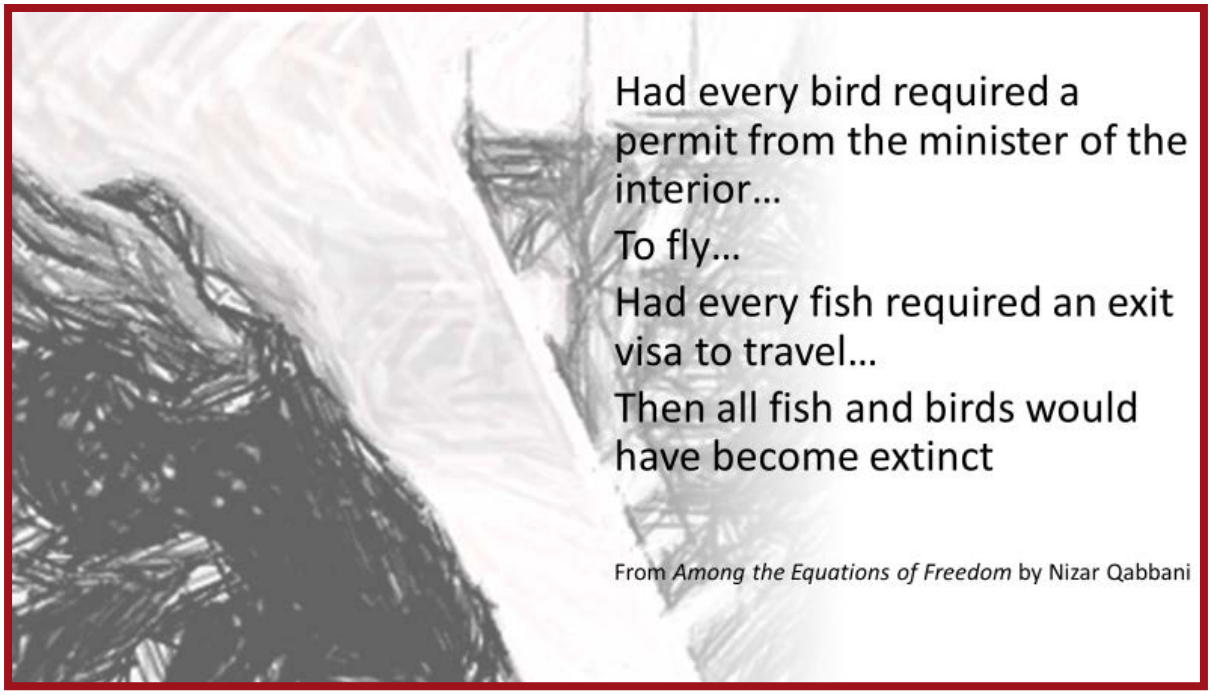
Participants and especially the peer-researchers often observed the impact their experience had on people who listened. They therefore advocated for more avenues where they could share aspects of their experience in order to engender understanding about refugees and international protection applicants as well as to put forward a counter narrative to unhealthy myths and stereotypes of refugees.

We put forward this recommendation with degree of caution however, as none of us truly know another's circumstances nor who or what someone who has been forcibly displaced has had to leave behind, nor how volatile the political situation may be in their country of origin.

202 Speed, F., McCombe, K., Mearns, G. & Chedgzoy, K. (2020). Supporting Sanctuary Students and Staff: Understanding the needs of students and staff from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds. Newcastle University: U.K.
203 https://inar.ie/enar-ireland-triggers-european-parliaments-investigation-of-ireland-on-hate-crime/
204 McGinnity, F., Creighton, M & Fahey, E. (2020). Hidden Versus Revealed Attitudes: A List Experiment on Support for Minorities in Ireland. Available from: https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/Hidden-Vs-Revealed-Attitudes-Report-IHREC-ESRI-July-2020-1.pdf
205 Speed, F., McCombe, K., Mearns, G. & Chedgzoy, K. (2020). Supporting Sanctuary Students and Staff: Understanding the needs of students and staff from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds. Newcastle University: U.K.
206 Sheridan,

We are not alone in grappling with seeking to balance the safety of participants versus the importance of including their voices in research and recognising the potential these have to make a positive impact.[207] The exposure of a real name attached to a real story can carry great risks for refugees including and not limited to; the possibility of deportation, an unwanted Direct Provision centre transfer, or backlash for the individual or for family members still living in the country of origin. Yet anonymity may mean that benefits related to future livelihoods such as self-promotion, self-empowerment and advocacy are foregone.[208]

The online world is small and news and media travels fast and far. In attempting to refute media 'othering' and 'dehumanising' by proffering a counter narrative attached to a real name, participants and their even loved ones could inadvertently be placed at unimaginable risk. In the next chapter, we will explore how we can create avenues to share refugee experience and influence public and political opinion through creative and arts-based methods that protect participant identity.



207 Akesson, B., El Joueidi. S., Hoffman, D.A. & Badawi, D. (2018). "So the World Will Know Our Story": Ethical Reflections on Research with Families Displaced by War. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung. 19. 5.10.17169/fqs-19.3.3087.

208 Gerver, M. (2013). Exceptions to blanket anonymity for the publication of interviews with refugees: African refugees in Israel as a case study. Research Ethics, 9(3), 121–139. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747016113481176

CHAPTER 8

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND WHERE NEXT?

8. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND WHERE NEXT?

"And I told them how I was cooking in the middle of the night, because there was no food for my children. And how my friends would bring me food so that my children could get nutrition. And that woman...from Department of Justice, she cried, and she apologised to me for my experiences. And I saw her face changing. Now your face is changing because you see me as human."

Focus Group Participant

8.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the findings from this research was in relation to the stigmatisation of refugees and protection applicants, which can manifest as internalised oppression; or as a feeling of having one's identity 'deconstructed' and replaced with that of a 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker', and as externalised oppression; the adverse effect of which is evident across the structural systems of; education, health and well-being, and employment, all of which have been further negatively impacted by the COVID 19 lockdowns.[209] Another finding is how stigmatisation has been exacerbated through a system of 'othering' and policy directives deliberately directed towards exclusion.

Employing the arts in social inquiry can give those involved in the research process insight into their own lives and identities allowing them to see themselves differently, while at the same time being able to share their stories with an audience who get a glimpse of what it is like to be someone else; the basis of all sympathy, empathy, and compassion.[210] Creative methods provoke insights that traditional research methods might fail to capture, as in arts-based-research the expression of meaning becomes central compared with science where meaning is stated.[211]

209 National Economic and Social Council. (2021). The Impacts of Covid-19 on Ethnic Minority and Migrant Groups in Ireland. National Economic and Social development Office: Ireland.

210 Foster, V. (2007). The Art of Empathy: Employing the Arts in Social Inquiry with Poor, Working-Class Women. Social Justice, 34(1 (107)), 12-27.

211 Butterwick, S. (2002). "Your Story/My Story/Our Story: Performing Interpretation in Participatory Theatre." Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 48:240–53.

Thoughtfully carried out, creative research can enliven adult learning, promote empathy for others, and move toward relations of solidarity.[212] We believe that arts-based-research also reflect the Adult and Community Education ideals on which the entire College Connect programme is built – 'empowerment, participative democracy and societal transformation.'[213] As Patricia Leavy says of arts-based research, 'there is no prescription for how it must be done. It is a project not a plan',[214] and as Fiona Whelan describes, it is often a project without direction requiring trust that in time it will lead to something of significance. [215] This chapter lays out the 'next steps' that we have taken in relation to actioning the findings of this research so far, and in designing how we think we can best engage the public with the 'needs' of refugees and people seeking asylum in relation to inclusion and participation at third-level.

As discussed, Participatory Action Research (PAR), is a continuous cycle of reflection and action, so the steps we are presenting here can only put forward a snapshot of where things are at the time of publication and signpost the direction in which we are moving and the motivation behind the movement. Nonetheless, we can be hopeful, given our experience on the College Connect CNA with Prisoners and Former Prisoners,[216] that the relationships and partnerships that have been established and developed on this research journey, will continue to strengthen through future collaboration and the mutual goal of improving access to higher education for refugees and people in the protection process.

8.2 SPOKEN WORD PERFORMANCE BY FELISPEAKS

How we know the world in emotional and embodied ways, stretch beyond the traditional format of excerpted prose from interview transcripts. Turning research interviews into poetry or monologues is a form of research analysis that goes by many names; poetic transcription, research poetry, transcript poetry.[217] Important in all of this is of course the written and oral tradition of poetry, and how this lends itself to the research dissemination process. Poetry has the attraction in that it can be read, performed, responded to, and presented in diverse settings to different audiences, bringing social theoretic understandings 'live' to bars, theatres, research conventions and media,[218] and more recently of course online onto webinars and Twitter and other social media platforms. To help communicate the research in an alternative form to an academic report, we enlisted the poetic and performance expertise of Felicia Olusanya.

212 Butterwick, S., & Roy, C. (2018). Introduction to Finding Voice and Listening: The Potential of Community and Arts-based Adult Education and Research. Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education, 30(2).
213 Grummell, B. (2007). 'The 'Second Chance' Myth: Equality of Opportunity in Irish Adult Education Policies' in British Journal of Education Studies Vol. 55 (2):182 – 201.
214 Leavy, P. (2010). A/r/t: A Poetic Montage. Qualitative Inquiry, 16(4). pp 240–243.
215 Whelan, F. (2019). Reconfiguring Systemic Power Relations: A Collaborative Practice-Based Exploration of Inequality with Young People and Adults in Dublin. Doctoral Thesis, Technological University Dublin.
216 Meaney, S. (2019). Community Needs Analysis with the Pathways Centre for Prisoners and Former Prisoners – A pilot study as part of College Connect. Maynooth University: Ireland.
217 Meaney Sartori, S. (2021). Education will set you free?' A creative exploration of the experience of educational exclusion, from the perspective of prisoners and youth. Maynooth University.
218 Richardson, L., (2000). Evaluating Ethnography – The Ohio State University. Qualitative Inquiry, Vol 6, No 2, pp. 253-255.

Felia Olusanya, aka Felispeaks, is a Nigerian-Irish poet, performer, and playwright from Co. Longford, based in Maynooth town. She is currently featured on the Leaving Certificate English Curriculum with her poem 'For Our Mothers' for examination year 2023. She was commissioned by RTE in 2020 with the poem 'Still' about Ireland's response to the COVID 19 lockdown, has been nominated 'best performer' by Dublin Fringe Festival, and has also been honoured with an award by the (APNI) African Professional Network of Ireland for her unique contribution to the art scene in Dublin. Felicia also spent six months at the Balseskin Direct Provision centre as a seven-year-old, when she moved to Ireland from Nigeria with her mother before settling in Longford where their application for refugee status was accepted.[219]

Felicia was given three transcript poems compiled by Dr. Sarah Meaney Sartori (who works with transcript poetry as a research method) from focus group discussions, that spoke to some of the emergent research themes; Delayed Futures, Deconstructed, and That 19 Euro? Felicia's artistic response to these transcript poems was audio recorded in April 2021, and the Felispeaks versions of these poems are interspersed through this report.

Two of the spoken word performances were made into videos that feature as part of cultural awareness training materials, and are available to watch here.

https://youtu.be/h9GLR6XNNog

219 The Irish Times (2020). '*For you. Ireland is standing still': stirring words of Covid poem provoke huge reaction*. Online available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/tv-radio-web/for-you-ireland-is-standing-still-stirring-words-of-covid-poem-provoke-huge-reaction-1.4370384

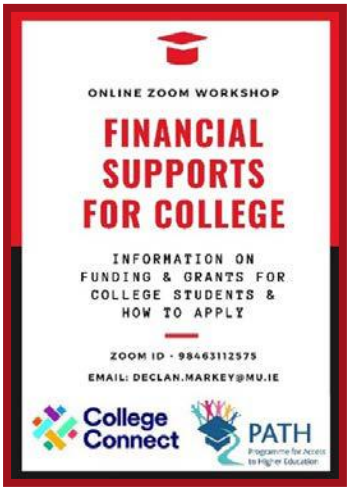
THAT 19 EURO

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAvxsEtwnmE

8.2.1 REFLECTION & ACTION – WEBINARS, COLLEGE INFORMATION, AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

As described at the beginning of this chapter, this research is based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) principals, and in PAR the reflection and action cycle is iterative, so while the work outlined here has been completed or is under development at the time of writing, it is an ongoing, continuous, and constantly changing process. At the time of writing, College Connect as a PATH 3 HEA funded project, has been extended to 2024. We therefore anticipate to see more events, similar to the ones described below, hosted and refined over the next three-year life cycle of the College Connect Programme.

8.2.2 INFORMATION WEBINARS ON ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION



One of the research findings from this Community Needs Analysis was in relation to information, and participants citing their difficulty in accessing correct and relevant information that pertained to their status. In response to this, College Connect organised a series of online events, supported by members from the peer-research team, hosted by Community Connector Declan Markey.

The first was a College Information Session, timed to coincide with Central Applications Office (CAO) applications, and the second, a funding information Webinar, timed to correspond with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI). The College Information Session attracted 26 refugee participants and the College Connect Information Session on Financial Supports for College attracted 19 attendees and was supported by Charlotte Byrne from the Irish Refugee Council.

8.2.3 CULTURAL AWARENESS WEBINARS

In response to the research-finding regarding the lack of cultural awareness in relation to refugees, College Connect worked with CNA peer-researcher Kinda Nassli to develop her idea for a presentation exploring Irish and Syrian cultural similarity through the literary works of Irish author Frank McCourt and Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani. Kinda presented to the research oversight group steering this research in December 2020, and was subsequently invited by MU UoS to present at Maynooth University Social Justice Week 8th March 2021 – 12th March 2021.

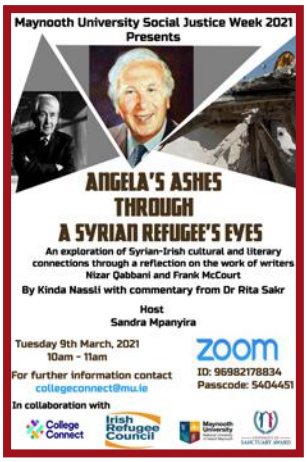
8.2.4 ANGELA'S ASHES THROUGH A SYRIAN REFUGEES EYES

Supported by MU, UoS, Irish Refugee Council and MU Access Office, 'Angela's Ashes through a Syrian Refugee's Eyes' explored cultural comparisons between Ireland and Syria through the literary works of McCourt and Qabbani. At this seminar, Kinda Nassli described how she had discovered the work of Frank McCourt upon moving to Ireland, finding elements of McCourt's narrative that resonated strongly with her own journey, as well as Qabbani's life and writings. Dr Rita Sakr of the Department of English gave an academic response to Kinda's reflection, rooted in her work on modern Arab (including diasporic) literature, and refugee and migrant literature. The session was chaired by Sandra Mpanyira and supported by Dr. Rose Ryan, Head of Maynooth Access Programme.

8.2.5 ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY FOR REFUGEES, INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION APPLICANTS AND MIGRANTS: BRINGING TOGETHER RESEARCH, CREATIVITY AND DISCUSSION

This seminar, hosted by MU UoS and supported by College Connect, brought together researchers, activists, and artists to examine access to university for international protection applicants and undocumented migrants.

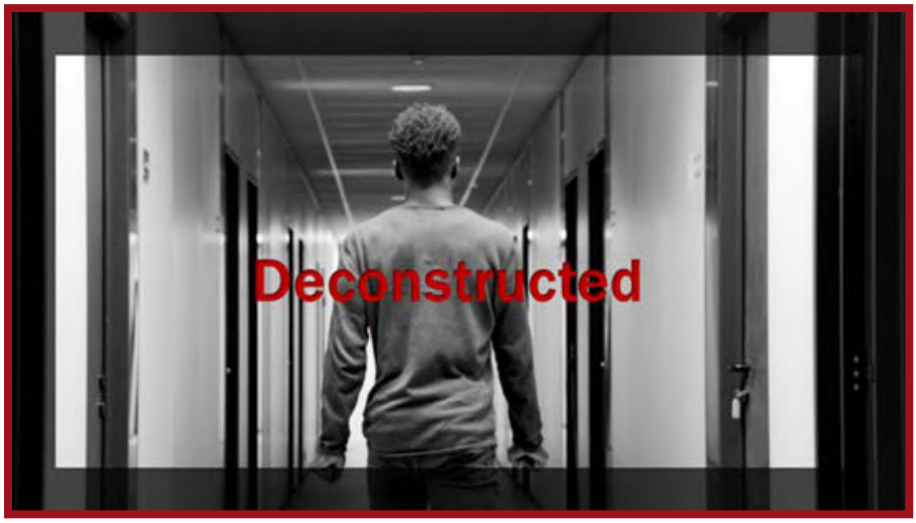
Peer-researchers from the CNA presented their work on accessing university education, using 'Photovoice'.



Frank Amarchie explained:

"You have to take into consideration integration and support. That is where mental health, counselling and supports comes in. The life in Direct Provision differs from the life on campus. Integration is one of the most important factor to consider right after the scholarship. College performance depends on the ability to forgo the current circumstances and move on with your academics. Sometimes the going goes very tough that you need someone who will understand your circumstances to speak to or advocate on your behalf".

8.3 'DECONSTRUCTED' - PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT VIDEO WITH FELISPEAKS AND MUFUTAU YUSUF



The term public engagement is used to describe the many ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public for mutual benefit. 'Deconstructed' is the three-minute public engagement video that was created to accompany this research. Alternative dissemination methods are important methods for all forms of public engagement, as academic diction common in reports and academic circles, may be frequently unintelligible to those outside those circles and therefore contribute to the exclusion we are purporting to be working to eradicate.[220] A culture change in academia has seen a shift towards 'research impact', and public engagement activities which might 'pre-impact' have been regarded by some academic departments as frivolous or tokenistic, have been elevated to a more creditable signifier of research 'worth' or contribution to society.[221]

220 Meaney-Sartori, S. (2021). *'Education will set you free?' – A creative exploration of the experience of Educational exclusion, from the perspective of prisoners and youth*. Maynooth University: Ireland.

221 Watermeyer, R. (2012). From Engagement to Impact? Articulating the Public Value of Academic Research. Tert Educ Manag 18, 115–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2011.641578

For 'Deconstructed' we worked with dance choreographer Catherine Young, who has been making and touring work to critical acclaim about the experience of refugees and people seeking asylum since 2011.[222] Felicia Olusanya performed the transcript poem 'Deconstructed' to camera, and Nigeria-born dancer Mufutau Yusuf, who had his introduction to contemporary dance at the age of 16 with Dublin Youth Dance, created an embodied response to the poem, in combination with Catherine Young's choreography. Videographer and film maker Davide Belotti, filmed Mufutau in Belgium where the two are based, and videographer and graphic designer Tyran Lovett, filmed Felicia in Camden Recording Studios in Dublin. Keith Walsh from Two Pair Films, who have won critical acclaim for documentaries such as Apples of the Golan,[223] and When All Is Ruin Once Again,[224] edited the dance and spoken word performances, with the aim of presenting 'one voice'.

Due to COVID restrictions, all the work on 'Deconstructed' was done remotely, and in small work pods. Deconstructed can be watched at; https://youtu.be/h9GLR6XNNog

8.4 THE 'WE ARE HERE, HEAR PROJECT' - TOURING OUTDOOR EXHIBITION, WEBSITE AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In early 2021 we spoke to the research team about curating an outdoor exhibition of participants' Photovoice, to take the work into the public arena, and the '*We are here, HEAR Project*' was conceived. Photovoice exhibitions have been used all over the world with the intention to foster social change, and if carried out as part of PAR, have shown positive individual empowerment results.[225]

222 https://www.rte.ie/culture/2018/0418/955359-why-we-need-to-celebrate-our-dance-artists/
223 https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/apples-of-the-golan-review-arab-fruit-on-the-heights-1.2067349
224 https://www.rte.ie/entertainment/movie-reviews/2020/0416/1130887-when-all-is-ruin-once-again-a-poignant-warning-note/
225 Budig, K., Diez, J., Conde, P. et al. (2018). Photovoice and empowerment: evaluating the transformative potential of a participatory action research project. *BMC Public Health* 18, 432. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5335-7

Most Photovoice projects disseminate the work through community exhibition, however, this process is seldom discussed in detail in published reports in terms of audience response, audience attendance, and whether the exhibition informed change, as well as the practicalities involved in curating a Photovoice exhibition.[226]

The '*We are here, HEAR Project*', one of 20 successful projects out of 279 to be funded by the Public Service Innovation Fund 2021, will contribute to existing literature on Photovoice exhibition, by being both an exhibition (outdoor and virtual) and a research project, both of which stemmed from this CNA in an attempt to engage the public around the barriers to HE, as experienced by refugees and international protection applicants.

The '*We are here, HEAR project*' is a collaboration between MU, DCU, College Connect, the Irish Refugee Council and Dublin Castle. The project launched with an outdoor Photovoice exhibition in the grounds of MU in October 2021, before it will move to DCU, TUS Athlone and Dublin Castle in early 2022, innovatively highlighting the dichotomy for people in the protection system in Ireland, who are often without citizenship, by occupying this iconic civic space. Specifically, the project aims to do the following;

- Promote increased awareness of barriers to HE experienced by refugees
- Engender a greater sense of ownership of civic space for refugees
- Inform of the experiences of the refugee community with regard to HE access
- Make visible experiences and voice of a community who are 'hidden'
- Represent the diversity of the community by occupying public and virtual space
- Take research outside the academy and into the public forum
- Provide an evidence base to capture reaction to the project, and ensure wide dissemination
- Offer cultural awareness seminars to better support access to HE for refugees

The European Council states that organisations play a pivotal role in the integration of refugees, by providing room for participative encounters,[227] something that is more urgent than ever given Ireland's growing refugee population. We are here, HEAR, provides an opportunity for interactive public engagement with a pressing social issue, something that has been limited during the COVID 19 lockdown.

226 Liebenberg, L. (2018). Thinking Critically About Photovoice: Achieving Empowerment and Social Change. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* Volume 17: 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918757631

227 European Agenda for Culture (2014). Report on the Role of Public Arts and Cultural Institutions in the Promotion of Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue. http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/reports/201405-omc-diversity-dialogue_en.pdf

8.5 WHERE NEXT?

This research process has led to multiple collaborative endeavours with individuals and organisations concerned with improving the educational and life outcomes for refugees and people in the protection process in Ireland. As we have seen in this chapter and throughout the report, this CNA used creative methods from the outset, both to explore participants' experience, as well as to represent findings. The presentation of the research from multiple perspectives with an ethic of solidarity, shifts focus from the relatable individual, who garners empathy, to the contours of systemic factors effecting a community.[228]

As we have presented in this report, the barriers faced by refugees when it comes to 'seeking a better future', are complex and many. Migration in and of itself has become a loaded term, and where once 'migrant' used to have a neutral connotation, it can now actually reinforce the dichotomy that we've adopted as a society between this notion of a 'good refugee' and a 'bad migrant'.[229] Research has shown that whereas the term 'refugee' evokes dependency-oriented stereotyping and helping intentions, the label 'economic migrant' evokes envious stereotypes and opposition to help.[230] This highlights the highly politicised context and the power of political and media rhetoric to influence public attitude and subsequently discrimination and prejudice.[231] From the outset, in the Irish media, people seeking asylum were represented as an 'economic threat', 'a threat to national and local integrity', a criminal element', and a 'contaminant'.[232] Two decades of government policies that appear to act on the presumption that people seeking asylum are bogus unless proven otherwise and want to take advantage of the Irish State's 'generous' welfare system,[233] have done little to appease racist stereotyping.

'Black Lives Matter' is an assertion that makes racist social structures visible worldwide, [234] and in the summer of 2020 Irish people took to the streets in their thousands to march in support of the movement. But the small rallies that took place following the shooting and killing of George Nkencho, a mentally ill Nigerian Irish man, by Irish Gardaí in December 2020 outside his family's home in Clonee in West Dublin, have been largely devoid of white activist support.[235]

228 Varma, A. (2020). Evoking Empathy or Enacting Solidarity with Marginalized Communities? A Case Study of Journalistic Humanizing Techniques in the San Francisco Homeless Project, Journalism Studies, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2020.1789495

229 Ruz, C. (2015). *The battle over the words used to describe migrants*. BBC News Magazine. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34061097

230 Wyszynski, M.C., Guerra, R. & Bierwiaczonek, K. (2020). Good refugees, bad migrants? Intergroup helping orientations toward refugees, migrants, and economic migrants in Germany. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol 50, Iss 10. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12699

231 Ibid

232 Haynes, A., Breen, M. & Devereux, E. (2005). Smuggling Zebras far Lunch: Media Framing of Asylum Seekers in the Irish Print Media. Etudes irlandaises. 30. 109-130. 10.3406/irlan.2005.2997

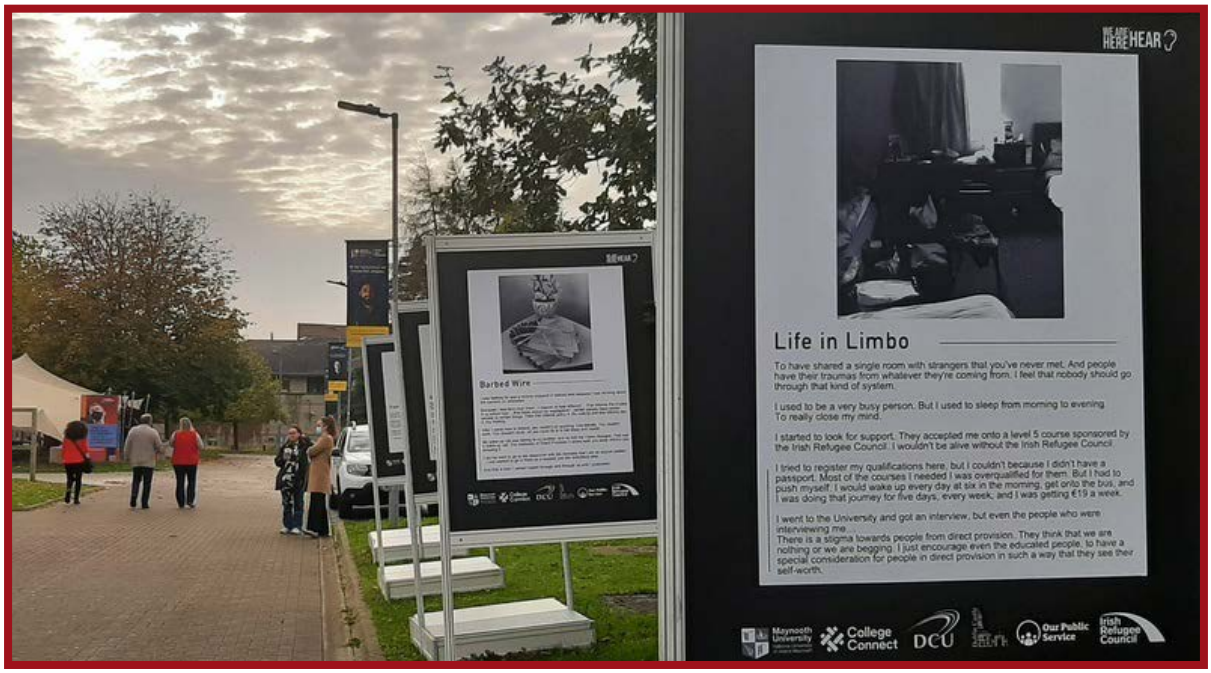
233 Ní Chiosáin, B. (2016). Ireland and its vulnerable "others": the reception of asylum seekers in Ireland. https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.4992

234 Press Statement: Black Lives Matter Berlin

235 Lawal, T. (2021). Where are they? The absence of white Irish activism after George Nkencho's death speaks volumes. Available at: https://www.image.ie/agenda/where-are-they-the-absence-of-of-white-irish-activists-after-george-nkenchos-death-speaks-volumes-230306

Furthermore, the fake news propaganda which circulated widely online following the shooting, which has now been documented as having been spread by Far-Right groups, led to the Nkencho family being the subject of violent and hate-filled threats fuelled by the disinformation.[236]

The Irish National Council Against Racism (INAR) has called for the education sector not only to provide anti-racism training to staff, but also to be able to provide guidance.[237] While Universities of Sanctuary are committed to creating a more welcoming and accessible HE sector to enable more people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds to reach their full potential and contribute to society,[238] we know that HE students from refugee backgrounds experience a stark divide between the two duelling identities of refugee and university student.[239] Therefore, we urge our HEIs to continue to strive for best practice in terms of interrogating privilege and institutional racism, as well as creating more opportunities for refugee voices to be heard, both inside and outside the academy. Finally, while this report is focussed on improving access to higher education in Ireland for refugees and people in the protection process, we recognise that the real issue at play is forced displacement,[240] and our ultimate goal should be absolute freedom so that every person can enjoy access to higher education in their home countries or anywhere else.



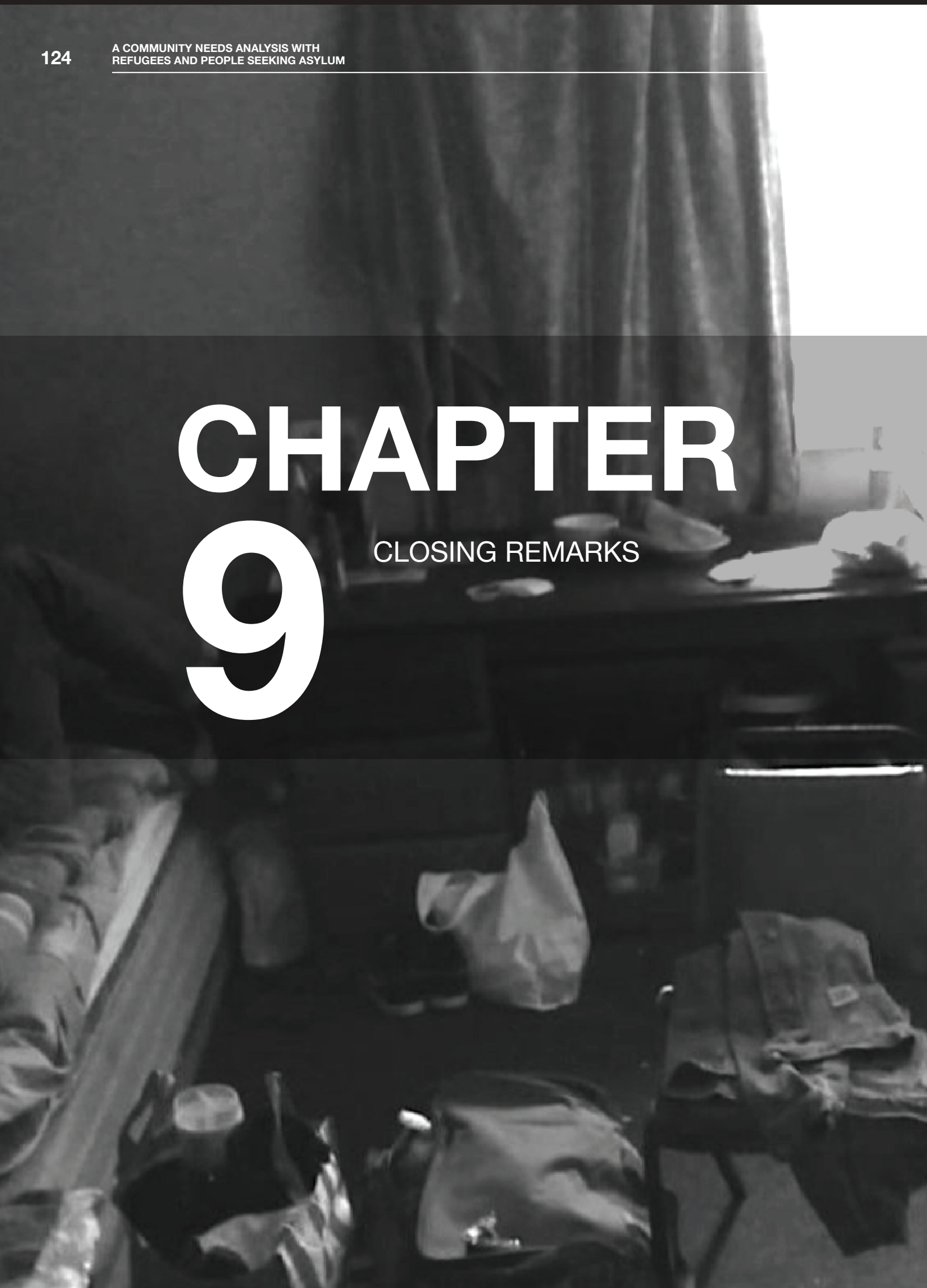
236 Gallagher, A. & O'Connor, C. (2021). *Layers of Lies: A First Look at Irish Far-Right Activity on Telegram*. ISD. Available at: https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/layers-of-lies/

237 Michael, L. (2020). Data from iReport.ie - Reports of racism in Ireland. INAR. Available at: https://inar.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2020_iReport.pdf

238 Speed, F., McCombe, K., Mearns, G. & Chedgzoy, K. (2020). Supporting Sanctuary Students and Staff: Understanding the needs of students and staff from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds. Newcastle University: U.K.

239 Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C. & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling identities in refugees learning through open, online higher education. DCU: Ireland

240 Ergin, H. (2019). Questioning the ethics and rationale of refugee research. University World News. Available at: https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190930082903163



CHAPTER 9

CLOSING REMARKS

9. CLOSING REMARKS

"The pain and the trauma that I went through there. That destroyed me, my family, my possessions, and reduced me to nothing…I still carried that, the destruction that that was caused in my country. So even here,… reduced to nothing. I could not provide for my family, I could not get a job, I could not do anything. So, to overcome all that pain, I took it to education. I said, 'I'm just going to try and focus on getting educated so that once I come through this, I'll make a better life for myself and my children"

Focus Group Participant

Many of the barriers experienced by refugees and those in the protection process overlap with some of those that were highlighted from a previous College Connect CNA with prisoners and former prisoners, such as; social exclusion, shame, stigma, inability to access information, trauma, and institutionalisation.[241] In turn, barriers mirror those which research has shown, are experienced by mature students in education. Barriers such as lack of finance, educational disadvantage, and dearth of affordable child-care.[242] These are some of the broader more general barriers that have arisen from this research, and which intersect across other cohorts under-represented in higher education to a large degree.

The structural and systemic barriers faced by refugees and international protection applicants, however, are considerable and particular to this cohort. Even when a person has survived whatever drove them to flee their home in the first place; lived through the migration journey, overcome the language barrier, the information and locational barriers, the financial hurdles, and against all the odds been able to access some form of education; the precarity of their position as a refugee can quite literally whip the ground from under them. It has been argued that this precarity is partially the consequence of a long history of racialisation that has determined that certain populations belong to Europe, and certain people – namely racialised others – do not.[243] [244]

241 Meaney, S. (2019). *Community Needs Analysis with the Pathways Centre for Prisoners and Former Prisoners – A pilot study as part of College Connect*. Maynooth University: Ireland.

242 Graham, H. (2015). Reengaging with Education as an Older Mature Student: Their Challenges, Their Achievements, Their Stories. DIT.DOI 10.21427/D7PJ4F

243 Frazier-Rath, E. (2019). Death, Deportation, Violence, Silence: Refugee Activism Against Precarity in Germany.

244 BBC. (2021). Denmark asylum: The Syrian refugees no longer welcome to stay. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57156835

> *"I got a huge opportunity. X offered me a scholarship for my bachelor. When I start my third year, the first week of my third year, I got deportation orders. It's a very, very disappointing moment for me"*
>
> Focus Group Participant

EU Immigration and asylum policies have been described as 'racialising' in their treatment of migrants and people seeking asylum,[245] and the Irish State has pursued policies which have made life incredibly difficult for refugees arriving in the country.[246] People seeking asylum are often in a prolonged state of precarity and insecurity regarding their status, and the threat of deportation can prevent speaking up and speaking out over inhumane treatment for fear of consequence. According to the Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone 'unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race'.[247] Therefore, as a precariously-situated population, defined and determined in part by the State, which has the ability to make a decision – whether to grant asylum or not, that can literally be the difference between life and death for refugees and contributes to silencing.[248] The International Protection Accommodation Services oversee the Direct Provision system, and there is little trust in their complaints procedure and limited publicly accessible information on either grievances or transfer decisions.[249] So, even on a lesser level, speaking-up can lead to being labelled a 'trouble-maker', and trouble-makers can be relocated to other more remote centres, which is still a significant consequence.[250]

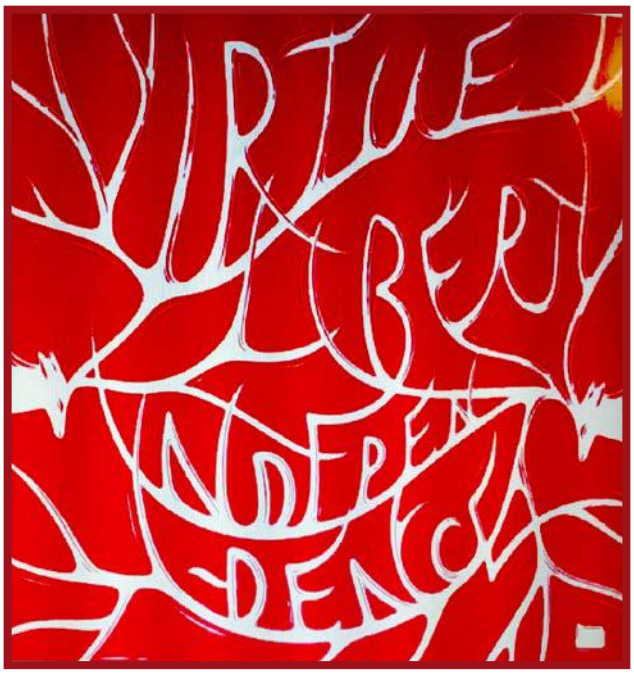
In Ireland, recent jurisprudence including Government and university schemes, while welcome developments, have failed to clarify the rights of refugees to access HE or the corresponding duties of the State in this regard.[251] There is no general consensus on whether there exists a constitutional right of access to higher education. Simultaneously, it is abundantly clear that the limitations placed on refugees and people in the protection process serve to cripple the scope for educational development and as such contribute and create substantial disadvantage for this cohort to discriminatory proportion.

245 Garner, S. (2009). Racisms. London: Sage.
246 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). "Chapter 12 Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland". In Refugees and Higher Education. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012
247 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, September 2011, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ec4a7f02.html
248 Frazier-Rath, E. (2019). Death, Deportation, Violence, Silence: Refugee Activism Against Precarity in Germany.
249 http://doras.org/direct-provision/
250 Sheridan, V. (2021). Counter stories: life experiences of refugee background mature students in higher education in Ireland. Race Ethnicity and Education, DOI:10.1080/13613324.2021.1890559
251 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). "Chapter 12 Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland". In Refugees and Higher Education. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012

These challenges are further exacerbated by a National HE Framework that does not explicitly acknowledge the role of HE in facilitating the integration of those seeking refuge.[252] Added to this, there is no monitoring of the participation of people seeking asylum and refugees in HE in Ireland, which is fundamental in terms of understanding the impact of policy and measures.[253]

In the face of discriminatory and deliberately prohibitory policies in place to impede access to HE for refugees and asylum seekers, proposing recommendations may seem arbitrary. Nevertheless, we feel the proposals for change being put forward here are achievable. Additionally, by communicating suggestions directly from those affected; particularly in light of there being few qualitative studies which privilege the voice of refugee background students and emphasise the voice of experience and the disruptive power of counter stories,[254] we believe acting on these recommendations will facilitate change.

The collaboration with the Irish Refugee Council has been eye-opening, and we hope this study provides deeper insights into the higher educational support needs of refugees and people seeking asylum. Amidst the identification of many critical needs, it is important to remember the strong base of good practice in the four HEIs supporting College Connect, particularly in relation to University of Sanctuary, of which all four colleges are part. The MEND HEIs are well-placed to become a model of excellence in widening participation, and to ensure that there are less 'delayed futures' as refugees and people seeking asylum work to rebuild their lives through education.



252 Cronin, M., Murphy, C., Doyle, D. M., Byrne, D., & Murphy, M. (2020). "Chapter 12 Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ireland". In Refugees and Higher Education. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435841_012

253 Sheridan, V. (2021). Counter stories: life experiences of refugee background mature students in higher education in Ireland. Race Ethnicity and Education. 1-18. 10.1080/13613324.2021.1890559

254 Ibid

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APPENDIX

1. I understand that all information here is anonymous. I understand that this survey is part of a College Connect research project in partnership with the Irish Refugee Council. I know that College Connect is made up 4 colleges; AIT, DCU, DkIT and MU, and uses community research to identify barriers experienced by people who are underrepresented in higher education. I understand that the aim of this research is to try to improve access to education for people like me, who are seeking asylum (protection applicant) or with refugee status. Required

- ☐ Yes

2. What is your age group? **Required*

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65+

3. What is your gender? **Required*

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other

4. Tick the option that best describes your residency status: **Required*

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Programme Refugee
- ☐ Convention Refugee
- ☐ Protection Applicant

- ☐ Granted Subsidiary Protection
- ☐ Leave to Remain/Permission to Remain
- ☐ Don't Know
- ☐ Stamp 4
- ☐ Other

4a. If you selected Other, please specify:

5. Are you currently in direct provision? **Required*

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5a. If you are not currently in direct provision, have you ever been in direct provision? **Required*

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5b. If you answered yes to question 5 or 5a above, can you say how long you lived/have lived in direct provision?

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Less than 6 months
- ☐ 6 months - 1 year
- ☐ 1 year - 2 years
- ☐ 2 years - 3 years
- ☐ 3 years-4 years
- ☐ 4 years - 5 years
- ☐ More than 5 years
- ☐ 5 years - 10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

6. Do you have a university qualification from your country of origin? *Required

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6a. If yes, have you been able to get your qualification recognised in Ireland?

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other

6b. If you selected other, please specify.

7. Are you currently studying in Ireland? *Required

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7a. If yes, what level?

7b. If you answered 'yes' to question 7 above, what has supported your studies? Example; SUSI, University of Sanctuary, the Irish Refugee Council education fund, Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project, having transport etc.

8. Have you accessed education in Ireland in the past? *Required

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8a. If yes, what level?

8b. If you answered ‘yes’ to question 8 above, what supported your studies? Example; SUSI, University of Sanctuary, the Irish Refugee Council education fund, Dún Laoghaire Refugee Project, having transport etc.

9. Do you plan to study in Ireland in the academic year 2021 - 2022? Required

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don’t Know

9a. If yes, what level?

9b. If you answered ‘no’, or ‘don’t know’ to question 9 above, can you say more?

10. What has made it difficult for you to access education in Ireland? Example; legal status, International fees, transport, finance, childcare, information etc.

11. What would make it easier for you to access education in Ireland? Example; legal status, standard fees, transport, finance, childcare, information etc.

12. Since Covid 19, a lot of study has moved online. Do you prefer online study? **Required*

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't Know
- ☐ Other

12a. If you selected 'Other', please specify:

13. Do you think you need additional support because of your experience as a refugee (Counselling/Trauma support/Language support etc.)? **Required*

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13a. If 'yes', please specify.

14. If you could change one thing to improve access to education for people seeking asylum or with refugee status, what would it be?

15. Please add anything else you feel is important to this space:

Thank you so much for participating in this survey which we will use to improve access to education in Ireland for people seeking asylum or with refugee status.

Your voice matters!

* This research has been approved by the Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Committee

www.collegeconnect.ie
#itcanbeyou

College Connect

Irish Refugee Council

Designed by Tyran Lovett
Produced by Wonder Works