



Church of Ireland  
Refugee Working Groups

# *Supporting asylum seekers and refugees*

*3rd edition · March 2018*



## Foreword

The mass movement of people fleeing war-torn countries in the Middle East, Africa and South East Asia, has impacted upon many countries around the world. Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are playing their part in providing a home for some of those who have been displaced.

Two working groups on the Church of Ireland's response to the refugee crisis were established in 2015, for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Members of the Church of Ireland have responded to the crisis in several ways, including alongside other Churches and organisations involved in this area of ministry. This resource includes examples of how the Church is directly responding (including through Bishops' Appeal), local opportunities to serve, background information on the asylum process and refugee resettlement, and a focus on the work of associated missionary societies and ecumenical organisations.

As refugees become more fully integrated into their new local communities, more opportunities will present themselves for Church of Ireland people across the island to offer welcome and practical support.

This resource is intended to be informative and encouraging. It is important that we are aware of the efforts being made in both jurisdictions and by our mission partners. We are indebted to all who have contributed to this updated resource for their invaluable assistance.

### **+Ken Derry & Raphoe**

Chair, Refugee Working Group (Northern Ireland)

### **+Patrick Tuam, Killala & Achonry**

Chair, Refugee Working Group (Republic of Ireland)

## Acknowledgements

This is the third edition of the Refugee Working Groups' resource on supporting asylum seekers and refugees. This resource is available for download from the Church of Ireland's online document library: [www.ireland.anglican.org/resources](http://www.ireland.anglican.org/resources)

The working groups are grateful to all who have contributed to the resource.

Photography has been kindly provided by Karen Bushby (Connor/St Anne's Cathedral), David Cavan (Tearfund), Roger Cooke (CMS Ireland), Lynn Glanville (Dublin and Glendalough), Anna Dubuis (UK Department for International Development), the Very Revd Alistair Grimason (Tuam, Killala and Achonry), the Revd Bruce Hayes (St Patrick's, Dalkey), and Sam Wynn (Cork, Cloyne and Ross).

## Responding to the refugee crisis

### *Background*

The history of the Church in Ireland has included St Patrick's experiences as a vulnerable migrant and the welcome given to Huguenot refugees fleeing France in the 17th and 18th centuries. Members of the Church of Ireland have supported refugees and asylum seekers over recent decades, including Vietnamese refugees arriving in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, those living in the Republic's direct provision system, and many seeking shelter from persecution whose needs have been met by mission societies overseas.

In September 2015, the archbishops and bishops of the Church of Ireland stated their willingness to engage with governments in response to the current refugee crisis. A three-fold response was outlined: prayerful intercession for refugees and governments; encouraging parishioners to write and meet with political representatives; and financial support via Bishops' Appeal.

Two working groups on the crisis were established for each jurisdiction – chaired by the Rt Revd Patrick Rooke in the Republic of Ireland and the Rt Revd Ken Good in Northern Ireland. The groups have been in contact with the Irish Government's Department of Justice and Equality and the Northern Ireland Executive's Department for Social Development (now Department for Communities) to offer assistance.

In the Republic, this has included attending a number of briefings with government officials, who have asked Churches to help by welcoming refugees, offering practical support, and speaking out against xenophobia. Following a resolution at the 2016 General Synod, a letter was sent on behalf of the bishops to the Irish Government, asking for the key recommendations of the *Protection, Resettlement and Integration* report to be implemented e.g. by enhancing legal channels for migration and improving the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The report is available at <http://bit.ly/2qtN0JH>

At the 2017 General Synod, speakers encouraged churches located near to reception centres to become involved in supporting people living in those centres and highlighted projects undertaken by dioceses and individual members of the Church. The working groups have commended the UK and Irish Governments – and communities across the island of Ireland – for their efforts to date in integrating asylum seekers and refugees and encouraged both administrations to keep under review the possibility of increasing the number of resettlement places for refugees. In Scripture, we read of how Mary and Joseph and the infant Jesus became refugees as they fled from Herod. Travelling into Egypt meant leaving everything behind and going to a foreign land where they would depend on the hospitality of strangers. As followers of Jesus Christ, we look forward to welcoming the stranger into our communities as a brother or sister made in the image of God.

*Our current response includes:*

The **Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough** are seeking to raise €300,000 to help the Irish Refugee Council provide housing for refugees. This project has, to date, secured 10 new properties which could accommodate over 40 people. Over €115,000 has been raised to date, partly through the proceeds of a concert last November at Christ Church Cathedral. The cathedral is Ireland's first University of Sanctuary and is home to the Our Table café, run by a team of staff and volunteers, including people with experience of the direct provision system.

In Belfast, **St Paul and St Barnabas, York Road**, (pictured right) is involved in a weekly drop-in for refugees, organised by All Nations Ministries and volunteers from a number of other churches. The parish is also running an 'Unlocking Potential' course, supported by Ulster University and many of the participants will be asylum seekers or refugees. In February of this year, the parish hosted a refugee welcome day and, in the same month, **St George's, High Street**, hosted a service of commemoration for those who have died in the Mediterranean.



**All Saints Church, University Street, Belfast**, provides a free English class with crèche (pictured below) for female refugees living in the area. A team of volunteers from the congregation provide the childcare while the women are taught English in the same room. The church also participates in the South Belfast foodbank with a group of parishioners volunteering at the Mornington venue on the Ormeau Road. The majority of the clients are refugees and asylum seekers who live in the local area.



**Wicklow Parish Church** is involved in a cross-community project which will bring a Syrian refugee family from Homs to live in the town under the Refugee Family Reunification Programme. This is the first community sponsored refugee integration project on the island of Ireland: [www.wicklowsyriaappeal.com](http://www.wicklowsyriaappeal.com)



**The Welcome Table** – a project run by St Patrick’s Church, Dalkey – gives asylum seekers living in direct provision centres access to a kitchen where a meal can be cooked. Some of the food prepared is eaten together at the end of the day with the local hosts. The rest of the food can be taken back to the centre for use at another time. There is no cost to participants and transport is provided to and from the church: [www.stpatricksdalkey.com/welcome-table](http://www.stpatricksdalkey.com/welcome-table)

Matthew Gault, Missions and Operations Coordinator at **Bangor Parish Church**, has completed a Masters in Theology dissertation on the response of the UK Church to the Syrian Civil War, which seeks to develop a theology of mission and pastoral care towards refugees. For more details, contact [matthew@bangorparishchurch.org.uk](mailto:matthew@bangorparishchurch.org.uk)



The 2018 Lenten Bible studies published by the **Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland** cover the Anglican Communion’s Five Marks of Mission and include a study by Philip McKinley on responding to human need by loving service. The 2017 series focused on *God’s Heart for Migrants – Biblical Wisdom for a World in Turmoil*. Both publications are available from [www.bibliahibernica.wordpress.com](http://www.bibliahibernica.wordpress.com)



From January this year, the Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal has provided a grant on a first come first served basis to people who wished to get a TEFL qualification (teaching English as a foreign language) so that they can volunteer to give English classes to asylum seekers and refugees living in Ireland.

Numerous people applied for the grant and over the course of the year, 14 people from all over Ireland will complete courses and receive qualifications. Some are already connected in with local community or church groups that provide support and friendship to migrants and can now offer an additional support. Others will be joining conversational English groups for the first time. Many of these groups have a deficit of English tutors so the grant addresses a pressing need.

Eighty-four per cent of all refugees live in the Global South. Bishops' Appeal funds a variety of programmes targeting refugees in Ethiopia, Uganda, Egypt, Bangladesh, Lebanon and Jordan. Some programmes provide emergency food, shelter, medicines and trauma counselling.

Where people have to put down roots in camps as they will be living there for some time, Bishops' Appeal has funded programmes that provide literacy circles, peace-building, pop-up school, and vocational training for child-headed households as well as football tournaments and play therapy as a way to enable children to be children even in unstable and uncertain circumstances.

For more information on Bishops' Appeal, please contact Lydia Monds, Education Advisor, by email at [bishopsappeal@ireland.anglican.org](mailto:bishopsappeal@ireland.anglican.org) or visit its website: [www.bishopsappeal.ireland.anglican.org](http://www.bishopsappeal.ireland.anglican.org)



*Past responses have included the following:*

At the height of the crisis in Europe (in late 2015 and early 2016), migrants and refugees in the Calais camp were supported through supplies sent from parishes in the **Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross**, and a visit to the camp by parishioners from **St John's Parish Church, Moira**.



The Mothers' Union in **Cork, Cloyne and Ross** knitted 200 'comfort teddies' for young migrants rescued by the Irish Naval Service, and dozens of teddies were sent by young parishioners from the **Church of the Good Shepherd, Monkstown**, through Project Paddington.

**St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast**, hosted the WelcomeFest concert (pictured right) for Refugee Week in June 2016. Its Black Santa appeal has supported Embrace NI in its work with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and helped the Migrant Centre NI to deliver training sessions for its 'Belonging Project' workshops.



A crisis appeal organised by the **Diocese of Tuam, Killala and Achonry** in late 2016 resulted in three containers of warm clothing, blankets, duvets, crutches and walking aids being sent to a hospital in Syria and a refugee camp in Northern Iraq. Asylum seekers shared their experiences in a series of talks at **Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin** – 'What's the Story? Lives in Direct Provision' – last September.

### *Further support for asylum seekers and refugees*

Clergy and parishioners are encouraged to take up opportunities to serve as and when they arise. Bryson Intercultural, which leads the group of agencies seeking to resettle Syrian refugees in Northern Ireland, has produced the following list of suggestions to help with integration:

- **brand new basic supplies and food** (a detailed list of the items needed can be provided on request);
- **vouchers** (which will be allocated by the team of key workers working individually with the families and in accordance with needs e.g. a locally accessible supermarket or a chemist);
- **awareness of local government or community services** – refugees need to understand how society and its services work and an organisation may come to speak to refugees about its service or offer to host them on a visit to come and see a local service (e.g. a library, community centre or health centre);
- **socialising or networking** – refugees need places and opportunities to interact in safe settings with each other and with the wider community (do you have an existing space and small group of people who meet e.g. a coffee morning, a book club, a women’s group, or a cooking demonstration?);
- **local cultural awareness** – refugees need to understand local culture (could your group offer a free cultural experience or a free visit to a local tourist attraction?);
- **apprenticeships, volunteering and/or employment** – refugees will come with particular skills and interests for the world of work, but may need support to adjust here (would your organisation be able to offer a short supportive apprenticeship or volunteering or employment experience?);
- **sport, music or dance** – is your organisation experienced in this field and could you offer an hour or two’s activity for adults and young people?
- **facilities** – do you have a large community space that you could offer for free for a day or an evening or weekend to host any of the support or sponsorship activities mentioned above?
- **transport** – could you offer a bus, buses or mini-buses to help with transporting refugees (with disability access if possible) e.g. to and from events, to accommodation and in order to help distribute donations?

This list is not exhaustive or definitive and people interested in providing assistance are encouraged to suggest any additional support that they may be able to provide.



Groups and individuals wishing to help can contact Brendan Quail on 028 9031 5744 or by email at [bquail@brysongroup.org](mailto:bquail@brysongroup.org) (or via [www.brysonintercultural.org](http://www.brysonintercultural.org)).

**Safeguarding guidance** is provided in a briefing paper provided by the Department for Communities: <http://bit.ly/2BuLYAX>

Tusla – the Child and Family Agency – is responsible for safeguarding in the Republic of Ireland: [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)

**International qualifications and skills** are formally recognised by the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NIRACs). The UK centre is managed on behalf of the UK Government's Department for Education ([www.naric.org.uk](http://www.naric.org.uk)) and the Irish centre is hosted by the Quality and Qualifications Ireland ([www.qqi.ie](http://www.qqi.ie)).

Colleges, businesses and community groups (including churches) have provided refugees with **English language classes, training and work placements** to help them to integrate in the longer term and to contribute their skills and expertise to Northern Ireland's society. Ligia Parizzi has been appointed to co-ordinate teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) to Syrian refugees in the further education and community sectors. She can be contacted on 028 9026 5233 or 07814046391, or by email: [Lparizzi@belfastmet.ac.uk](mailto:Lparizzi@belfastmet.ac.uk)

The **Irish Red Cross** has been tasked with collecting pledges of accommodation, goods and services in the Republic of Ireland: <http://registerofpledges.redcross.ie>

Charities, including St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army and Crosscare, assist migrants alongside their other local clients, as do local foodbanks. The **Storehouse** ministries in Belfast and North Down, for example, supply a range of people in need with clothes, toys, toiletries, food and other resources. More information is available at [www.storehousebelfast.com](http://www.storehousebelfast.com) and [www.storehousenorthdown.com](http://www.storehousenorthdown.com)

A number of local support groups have been established in areas where asylum seekers and refugees are housed through direct provision and the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. Church of Ireland members, alongside others, support the **Killarney Asylum Seekers Initiative** ([www.facebook.com/kasikillarney](http://www.facebook.com/kasikillarney)) and **Déise Refugee Response** in County Waterford: [www.facebook.com/deiserefugeeresponse](http://www.facebook.com/deiserefugeeresponse)

**Fáilte Isteach** is a community project involving predominantly older volunteers who welcome migrants through conversational English classes. It has 107 groups across the Republic with over 1,000 volunteer tutors helping 3,200 migrants: [www.thirdageireland.ie/failte-isteach/get-involved](http://www.thirdageireland.ie/failte-isteach/get-involved)

As part of a Dublin City Council social inclusion project, the **Intercultural Language Service** is offering free English language lessons at Ballybough Community Centre for people who are struggling with language in their daily lives, for work, health and education etc. Training and materials are provided. Classes are held every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 10am to 12pm until June 2018. More information is available from Peter Sheekey at 0851444076 or [dublincityilc@gmail.com](mailto:dublincityilc@gmail.com)

**EMBRACE NI** is a group of Christians from different denominations working together to promote a positive response to people who are seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Speakers are available to meet with groups of churches with an interest in developing their ministry in this area. A range of resources on migration from a Christian perspective is available at [www.embraceni.org](http://www.embraceni.org) and EMBRACE NI can also be contacted on [info@embraceni.org](mailto:info@embraceni.org)

EMBRACE also administers an emergency fund which supports refugees in crisis, following referrals from other recognised support organisations. To date, a total of £14,696 from this fund has assisted all 860 Syrian resettlement refugees in Northern Ireland e.g. by providing electricity and gas in their new homes. From January 2016 to January 2018, a further £12,010 was given towards meeting the needs of destitute asylum seekers and new refugees.

The **City of Sanctuary** movement ([www.cityofsanctuary.org](http://www.cityofsanctuary.org)), which seeks to build a culture of hospitality for refugees, is active in several towns and cities. Dublin City University is Ireland's first **University of Sanctuary** – an initiative which includes scholarships for asylum seekers and refugees, volunteering at Mosney direct provision centre, an annual Refugee Week, and a commitment to research into forced migration and related issues. The university hosts an active Church of Ireland chaplaincy which operates from the Inter Faith Centre, on the Glasnevin campus (pictured below).

The University of Limerick, Athlone Institute of Technology and University College Cork are all now also accredited as Universities of Sanctuary. There are a number of Schools of Sanctuary in Northern Ireland.



A paper on how to become a 'sanctuary church' (or group of churches) has been published by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland: <http://bit.ly/2BuRDXL>

Listings of support organisations are provided in the International Protection Office's *Information Booklet for Applicants for International Protection* (<http://bit.ly/2EpeDWA>), for the Republic, and also in *Refugees in Northern Ireland – Some Basic Facts* (<http://bit.ly/2GQthqQ>), published by Embrace NI.

The **UK Refugee Council** ([www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)) and the **Irish Refugee Council** ([www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie](http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie)) advocate for the needs of refugees in their respective jurisdictions. The **Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership** ([www.migrationni.org](http://www.migrationni.org)) works to reflect the specific needs of Northern Ireland in the development and implementation of UK immigration policy.

## Definitions: migrants, asylum seekers and refugees

The term refugee is often the best phrase to describe anyone who has been forced to flee their home. In the processes for assessing refugee status, a number of different categories are used to describe people who are seeking that form of protection.

Asylum seekers and refugees are **migrants** although the term itself covers a much larger group of people. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his or her habitual place of residence.

An **asylum seeker** is a person who has left their country of origin and has formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application for refugee status has not yet been accepted.

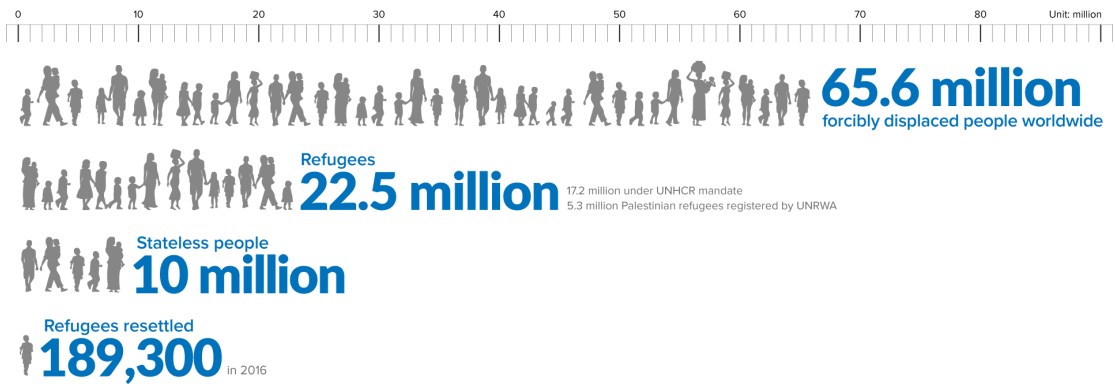
A **refugee** is a person who – owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion – is either:

- outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or (owing to such fear) unwilling to avail of the protection of that country; or
- without a nationality and outside the country of his or her former habitual residence (for the same reasons as above), and is unable or is unwilling to return to it.

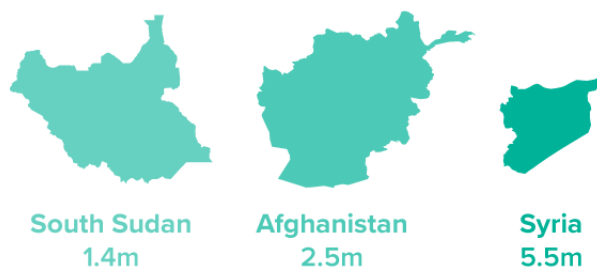
National governments have the primary responsibility for determining refugee status but the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR – the UN Refugee Agency) may also do so in a wide number of circumstances e.g. in refugee camps.

In addition, there are a number of groups with similar experiences to refugees and asylum seekers. These include **internally displaced persons** who have been forced to flee their homes in the same way as refugees but who remain in their own country and have not crossed an international border, **returnees** (refugees who have returned to their home country but have not yet been fully integrated into their society), **stateless persons** and **refused asylum seekers** (who may voluntarily return or be involuntarily returned to their home country, or who are unable to return).

If it is decided that a person is not a refugee, he or she may qualify for **subsidiary protection** if there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to their country of origin or country of former habitual residence.

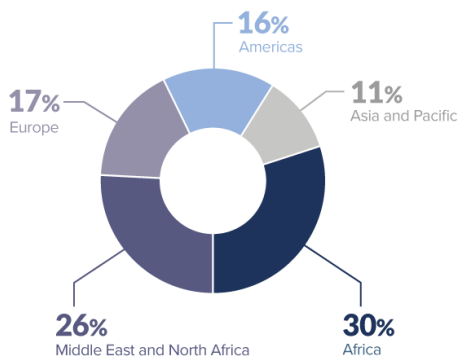


**55%** of refugees worldwide came from three countries

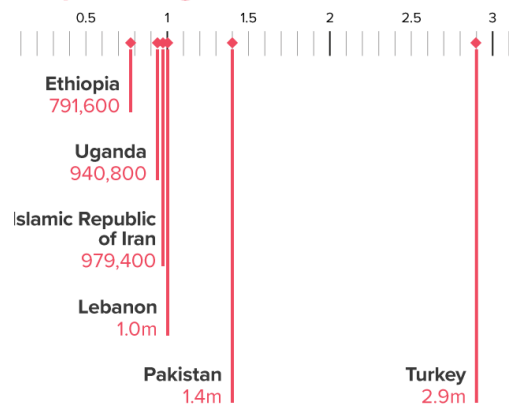


**28,300 people** a day forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution

Where the world's displaced people are being hosted



Top hosting countries



Source: UNHCR

Note: Figures are for 2016 and refer to refugees under the UNHCR's mandate (covering 17.2 million persons) unless otherwise stated. A further 5.3 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency.

## Ireland in context

The following statistics outline the main groups of asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons on the island of Ireland (where information is available).

# 5,731

Refugees in the  
Republic of Ireland  
UNHCR, December 2016

# 5,182

Asylum seekers in the  
Republic of Ireland  
(living in direct provision  
and self-catering facilities)  
Department of Justice and  
Equality, December 2017

# 792

Refugees resettled from  
Lebanon to the  
Republic  
of Ireland  
Department of Justice and  
Equality, March 2018

# 1,063

Asylum seekers  
relocated from Greece  
and France to the  
Republic of Ireland  
Department of Justice and  
Equality, March 2018



*Map credit: Nick Shanks*

# 99

Stateless persons in the  
Republic of Ireland  
UNHCR, December 2016

# 720

Asylum seekers in  
Northern Ireland  
Housing Executive,  
August 2017

# 860

Syrian refugees resettled  
from the Middle East to  
Northern Ireland  
Department for Communities,  
February 2018

Regular updates are available from the UNHCR ([popstats.unhcr.org](http://popstats.unhcr.org)), the Republic's International Protection Office ([www.ipo.gov.ie](http://www.ipo.gov.ie)) and the UK Home Office ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)).



## Applying for asylum

### *Republic of Ireland*

The Republic of Ireland's asylum process is administered by the International Protection Office (IPO) – an office within the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. The IPO was established in December 2016, as a successor to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

Asylum seekers must firstly complete a preliminary interview which will be followed by a recommendation on whether or not the application is admissible. The next stage is an international protection interview after which the application is considered in more detail.

Asylum seekers are required to inform the IPO about changes in their circumstances. The Supreme Court ruled in January that the bar on seeking employment was unconstitutional. The Republic is expected to opt into the EU's Reception Conditions Directive, which allows for asylum seekers' access to the labour market, in June. In the meantime, asylum seekers can apply for an employment permit or request permission to be self-employed.

Applicants are entitled to legal advice and an offer of accommodation (via the direct provision system or self-catering centres). This is provided by the Reception and Integration Agency ([www.ria.gov.ie](http://www.ria.gov.ie)) which oversees 34 reception and accommodation centres and two self-catering centres. They are entitled to receive a weekly allowance of €21.60 per person (with the same rate for adults and children).

People who receive refugee status are entitled to work and to receive support through social security and public services, and have rights to family reunification. They are entitled to reside in Ireland for a specified period of not less than three years, which is renewable.

Appeals on decisions for asylum can be made via the International Protection Appeals Tribunal ([www.protectionappeals.ie](http://www.protectionappeals.ie)). More information on the Irish asylum process is available at [www.ipa.gov.ie](http://www.ipa.gov.ie)

### *Northern Ireland*

The asylum process is administered by the UK Home Office. Once an application has been submitted, the asylum seeker will have a meeting with an immigration officer (screening) and then an asylum interview with a case worker.

Asylum seekers are required to inform the Home Office if their circumstances change and will not usually be allowed to work while their claim is being considered. However, they can receive housing, financial assistance (asylum support of £37.75 per week for each person in the household) and help with legal representation. Most live in private rented accommodation in Belfast.

As in the Republic of Ireland, people who receive refugee status are entitled to work and to receive support through social security and public services, and have rights to family reunification. Refugees are currently granted five years of residence in the UK after which they may seek permanent settlement.

Appeals on decisions for asylum can be made via the First-tier Tribunal's Immigration and Asylum chamber (<http://bit.ly/2EZZXO4>). More information on the UK asylum process is available at [www.gov.uk/claim-asylum](http://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum)

## Resettlement of refugees

### *Republic of Ireland*

Ireland has undertaken several resettlement programmes since the 1950s, accommodating refugees from countries including Hungary, Chile, Vietnam, Iran, Bosnia and Kosovo. In 2014, the Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme allocated humanitarian visas to families of Syrians in Ireland who had been forced to flee their homes. The Irish Refugee Protection Programme was established in September 2015.

Ireland has committed to admit 4,000 people and the focus of the programme is largely on families and children. It incorporates the **resettlement** (of refugees recognised by the UNHCR who are living outside the EU) and the **relocation** of asylum seekers living in Greece and Italy (outlined in the next section).

Within the resettlement strand, Ireland committed to accept 1,040 refugees by the end of 2017. As of March this year, 792 refugees have been resettled but there are plans to accept a total of 600 refugees in 2018 and a further 600 refugees in 2019. These will include people resettled under the new **Family Reunification Humanitarian Admission Programme** (FRHAP), which will have 530 places.

### *Northern Ireland*

Northern Ireland played its part in the UK's resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in 1979-1980. The resettlement of refugees in the United Kingdom today takes place through four schemes.

The **Gateway Protection Programme** and **Mandate Refugee Scheme** resettle refugees from a range of nationalities referred to the UK by the UNHCR. Mandate supports refugees who have a close family member in the UK. In 2017, the UK resettled 813 Gateway refugees and 28 Mandate refugees.

The **Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)** was set up in 2014 and expanded in 2015 with the aim of resettling up to 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK.

This scheme receives applications from refugees in countries bordering Syria (principally Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey). A total of 10,538 VPRS refugees had been resettled in the UK by the end of 2017.

Some of the VPRS refugees have also been supported in Great Britain since July 2016 through a **Home Office Community Sponsorship Scheme** but the scheme is not available in Northern Ireland at present. The VPRS gives priority to people with medical needs or who have survived violence and torture, women at risk, particularly vulnerable children and elderly people, and people with legal and physical protection needs.

The **Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme** was launched in April 2016, with the aim of accommodating 3,000 children at risk and their family members from conflict situations in the Middle East and North Africa. A total of 371 people were resettled by June 2017.

The Home Office arranges exit visas from the host country and entry visas into the UK. The Northern Ireland Executive is responsible for making arrangements to receive and settle the refugees when they arrive in the region. A total of 860 Syrian refugees had been resettled into Northern Ireland by February this year. Groups are arriving around every six weeks with a projected total of no more than 2,000 people to be resettled after five years. Regional information on resettlement is only available for the VPRS.

### Relocation of asylum seekers

Following the mass migration into Southern Europe in 2015, the EU introduced a scheme to relocate asylum seekers living in Greece and Italy to other member states. The UK has opted out of the scheme whereas Ireland has voluntarily opted in.

The Republic of Ireland has pledged to accept 2,622 asylum seekers under the relocation strand of the programme. This includes 1,089 relocated from Greece, of whom 1,022 have arrived as of March this year. A further 623 were to be relocated from Italy but this has not been possible, partly due to difficulties in vetting and security arrangements. Another 910 places for asylum seekers due to be relocated to the Republic have not yet been allocated by the European Commission.

Relocated asylum seekers are selected as they have a high chance of being accepted as refugees when their applications are processed in the receiving country. Tusla coordinates and leads on the relocation of unaccompanied minors from Calais (the **Calais Special Project**) and, to date, 41 young people have been admitted through this process.

A UK Government scheme, under the **Dubs amendment**, has been set up to relocate unaccompanied refugee children currently in Europe. This allows for the resettlement of 480 children. Information on the scheme is not available at a regional level but it does not appear that any have been dispersed to Northern Ireland.

## Responding to fear and giving empathy

The mass movement of mixed groups of migrants and refugees has added to pre-existing local anxieties. People who already worried that immigration would change their communities now have an additional fear that refugees may threaten their security. These fears can be reduced when people have a chance to meet and share life experiences with people who are the survivors rather than the cause of the conflict that has engulfed them.

Many fears are overcome when people meet with asylum seekers and refugees and share life together. For example, the Belfast Friendship Club ([www.belfastfriendshipclub.org](http://www.belfastfriendshipclub.org)) is a space for long-term residents and people who are new to the city to make friends and help each other. Their example is being replicated in other parts of the UK. Likewise, Refugee and Migrant Solidarity Ireland ([www.ramsi.info](http://www.ramsi.info)) has organised solidarity dinners for asylum seekers, refugees and long-term residents in Waterford, Killarney and Mosney, and is keen to organise more of these events at a local level.

Church congregations have a natural role in bringing people together in a local community and helping them to understand each other. Indeed, some Protestant congregations on the island of Ireland have grown considerably through welcoming refugees as members.

Asylum seekers and refugees experience stress and fear whilst living here. It is easy to assume that a safe location will make people feel better about their situation but for asylum seekers the process is stressful. There is fear about the outcome of their case and the possibility that they may be returned to their country of origin. Enforced idleness can add to these fears and increases anxiety and depression. People live with low incomes and can experience culture shock and isolation, often complicated by language barriers and a lack of community. Refugees with leave to remain may feel a little more secure but still have many adjustments to make. Within both groups, there will be people who are traumatised by their experiences, grieving for lost relatives or suffering from the after-effects of injury or torture.

All need to be met half-way by local people in learning how to fit in. Where asylum seekers or refugees have been housed on the island of Ireland, Christian people have assisted in the integration process – within their congregations and in specialist groups – and churches are well placed to continue to do so in the current situation. Events which enable local people and newcomers to meet, share food and have conversations can open up opportunities in any parish setting.

## Associated missionary societies

Several of the Church of Ireland's associated missionary societies work with asylum seekers and refugees in a variety of contexts. A selection of these activities and resources produced by the societies on migration is outlined below.

The **Bible Society in Northern Ireland** ([www.bsni.co.uk](http://www.bsni.co.uk)) can channel support directly to other Bible societies working with refugees in their context. For example, the Bible Society in Lebanon provides aid packages for refugee families, which include food, hygiene and cleaning products, and which are given with the offer of Scripture – a children's Bible, gospel portion, New Testament and colouring book. There is also work happening in Austria where the Bible Society is providing churches and detention centres with Scripture in various languages to give to the many asylum seekers living in the country.

*On the Road: a journey through the Bible for migrants* is a Bible study resource that has been used to speak to migrants in many countries. Copies are currently available – in Arabic and Farsi – at £1 each by contacting the Bible Society in Northern Ireland on 028 9032 6577 or calling into its office in Belfast. An article with some helpful verses is available from United Bible Societies at <http://bit.ly/2BZnO2p>

**CMS Ireland** ([www.cmsireland.org](http://www.cmsireland.org)) supports a number of initiatives by its global partners as they provide care and assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons, and those who are returning home after being displaced.



Bukavu Diocese, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, cares for women and children affected by the war through support groups and workshops to enable them to acquire skills. Recently, the diocese informed CMS Ireland of a new influx of people into the area. Emergency assistance was needed to bridge their immediate needs so that they could settle down in order to access further help. Through their link parishes in Ireland, Bukavu Diocese was able to provide corn meal, beans and oil for these families.

CMS Ireland provides support to the Nuba Mountain Bible Institute in Cairo as it trains church leaders from Sudan who have had to flee their homes due to violence. Church of Ireland parishes are helping the institute cover the costs of a number of the students, all of whom hope to return to Sudan and lead churches there.

CMS Ireland is also working with the Diocese of Egypt to secure funding for a new programme that will provide support and guidance for young refugees.

Madi West Nile Diocese, northwest Uganda, is continuing to provide pastoral care, trauma counselling, training and Sunday school resources to South Sudanese refugees living in the large camps in and around Arua town.



Recent months have seen parts of South Sudan become more peaceful and stable. Some of the refugees have started to return home but they arrive to find houses burnt down, crops destroyed and basic services all but absent. CMS Ireland has been supporting Olo Diocese (linked with Maridi Diocese) to provide food and fuel to families. Similar support is likely to be needed in Yei Diocese in the coming weeks. In Kajo-Keji Diocese, support has been given to help the Church establish new 'under-tree' schools to help bridge the education gaps that have emerged through the conflict.

The Diocese of Connor has donated £11,000 through CMS Ireland towards alleviating suffering caused by the civil war in South Sudan. This followed an appeal by Bishop Hilary Adeba (Diocese of Yei) in March last year.

**Crosslinks** mission partners Andrew and Eunice Moody work with South Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda, teaching around 240 pastors and lay readers from the Episcopal Church of South Sudan. Resources are provided to the students in their own language (Dinka Bor) so that they can take the teaching home with them: [www.crosslinks.org](http://www.crosslinks.org)

**Tearfund** works with refugees across the Middle East and North Africa supporting families who urgently need access to safe water, shelter, medical supplies and vital essentials, and providing workshops to help people cope with trauma and temporary schooling for refugee children ([www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org) / [www.tearfund.ie](http://www.tearfund.ie)).



**USPG** works with the Anglican Diocese in Europe and ecumenically to support refugees and asylum seekers, with a particular focus on Greece. This includes medical care, legal advice, shelters for unaccompanied minors, education, and the provision of essential supplies. USPG's *Migration and Movement* Bible study course is available at [www.uspg.org.uk/resources/study](http://www.uspg.org.uk/resources/study)

The **Intercontinental Church Society** ([www.ics-uk.org](http://www.ics-uk.org)) has links with Anglican congregations in Europe which minister to refugees and other migrants. **Irish Church Missions** ([www.irishchurchmissions.ie](http://www.irishchurchmissions.ie)) is involved in outreach to Iranian asylum seekers in Dublin. The **Mission to Seafarers** ([www.missiontoseafarers.org](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org)) has highlighted the impact of refugee migration in the Mediterranean on the crews of vessels rescuing refugees and the high level of courage shown by seafarers in those situations.

## Ecumenical networks



A Rohingya mother and her child seeking refuge in Bangladesh.

**Christian Aid** ([www.christianaid.ie](http://www.christianaid.ie)) originated in the ecumenical response by British and Irish Church leaders to the European refugee crisis after the Second World War. The charity is working with its partners in Bangladesh providing food, clean water and shelter for Rohingya refugees who have crossed the border from Myanmar, including many vulnerable women and children. The agency continues to support asylum seekers in Europe and internally displaced people in other situations – mainly in South Sudan, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The **Irish Council of Churches** ([www.irishchurches.org](http://www.irishchurches.org)) has published ten *Affirmations on Migration, Diversity and Interculturalism* which seek to recognise and appreciate cultural and ethnic diversity as gifts of God, and to ensure that these gifts are reflected in the life of the Church and wider society: <http://bit.ly/2F7WcGZ>

Dr Damian Jackson, the ICC's Programme Officer, can provide more information on the response of Churches in Ireland to migration: [damian@irishchurches.org](mailto:damian@irishchurches.org)

Similarly, the *Focus on Refugees* blog – run by **Churches Together in Britain and Ireland** – highlights responses by Churches across the UK and Ireland, including the work of the Churches' Refugee Network ([www.focusonrefugees.org](http://www.focusonrefugees.org)). The Roman Catholic Church takes a strong interest in migration, including through the work of the **Jesuit Refugee Service** (<http://en.jrs.net>).

The **Conference of European Churches** takes a particular interest in migration and asylum issues through the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe ([www.ccme.be](http://www.ccme.be)). The **World Council of Churches** has called on Churches to join a pilgrimage of justice and peace, which includes concern for refugees and a call to affirm, sustain, and protect life. Participants are encouraged to share ideas and learn from fellow pilgrims: [www.oikoumene.org/pilgrimage](http://www.oikoumene.org/pilgrimage)

## Conclusion

We cannot know with certainty how long the refugee crisis will continue or indeed how it will develop in the months and years ahead. The level of human need, though, is very clear and we would encourage members of the Church to continue to give their prayerful and practical support to people who are seeking asylum or adjusting to life as refugees in Ireland and abroad.

This resource is offered as a guide to inform the Church about the current situation and to outline some of the opportunities to pray, serve and otherwise assist with ministries which support those who face these challenges. In doing so, we help to fulfil Christ's call to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.

*Look, we beseech thee, O Lord, upon the people of this land who are called after thy holy Name; and grant that they may ever walk worthy of their Christian profession. Grant unto us all that, laying aside our divisions we may be united in heart and mind to bear the burdens which are laid upon us. Help us to respond to the call of our country according to our several powers; put far from us selfish indifference to the needs of others; and give us grace to fulfil our daily duties with sober diligence. Keep us from all uncharitableness in word or deed; and enable us by patient continuance in well-doing to glorify thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

A Prayer for Christian Citizenship  
Book of Common Prayer