



25 May 2023

Ms Dunja Mijatović
Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe

Dear Commissioner Mijatović

Thank you for your recent letter concerning the challenges being experienced in the reception and accommodation of International Protection applicants in Ireland in recent months.

As you are aware, since the outset of Russia's full-scale illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ireland has seen an unprecedented number of people arrive here fleeing both the Russian aggression, as well as people seeking international protection.

To date, Ireland has granted temporary protection to a total of 83,000 people displaced by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine which is 2% of all temporary protections granted across 27 EU Member States, plus Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, and equivalent to 1.6% of our total population.

Over 64,390 of these have sought accommodation provided by the State. Furthermore, 20,500 persons are being accommodated by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) as of 14 May 2023. The corresponding figure for the end of February 2022 was 8,000 persons in IPAS accommodation. Consequently, over 84,890 people are now in state sourced accommodation, between those fleeing war in Ukraine and those in IPAS accommodation.

The provision of accommodation, health, education, income and other assistance, as appropriate, to both those arriving from Ukraine and international protection applicants is an ongoing focus of the work of the Cabinet Committee on Ukraine which I chair as part of our ongoing whole of government humanitarian response. This Cabinet Committee is helped in its work by a Senior Officials Group comprised of all relevant government departments and agencies, including the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage as well as Local Government.

Additional resources and new processes and structures to integrate expertise and efforts are in place. These are being deployed to deal with the issues arising in what is an extremely challenging situation.

Due to the sheer scale of the numbers arriving, in the midst of a pre-existing housing shortage in Ireland, there have been particular difficulties in sourcing sufficient amounts of accommodation to meet the increased demand. Under the Cabinet Committee a dedicated Accommodation Working Group is focused on maximising the scale and pace of delivering accommodation for people arriving from Ukraine as well as international protection applicants. This involves new strands of work, including consideration of commercial properties and sites for development, refurbishment or purchase of buildings, and the use of alternative modular buildings.



While work is ongoing on a range of accommodation options, the Government recognises that the current situation falls short of what is required and is working tirelessly to deal with the problem.

In the first twenty weeks of 2023, over 3,600 international protection applicants have sought accommodation from the State while their applications are assessed by the International Protection Office.

The International Protection Procurement Service (IPPS) has used all means at its disposal to procure accommodation to meet this unprecedented increase in demand such as hotels, guesthouses, arenas, repurposed offices, religious buildings, and student accommodation. Tented facilities are also in use by State-owned IPAS centres as short-term emergency accommodation.

While IPPS has procured over 5,880 beds so far this year it has also had to find alternative accommodation for an additional 2,543 persons in hotels as accommodation supply is also affected by the start of the tourist season.

In spite of these intensive efforts, demand has consistently outstripped accommodation supply. IPAS has been unable to accommodate a proportion of arrivals since January 24th. As of 23rd May there were 199 persons to whom IPAS has been unable to offer accommodation.

Government departments are working together and with NGOs to provide services for those whom it is unable initially to accommodate. Arrangements have been made for the equivalent of the payment normally made to those in international protection accommodation to be made available to unaccommodated international protection applicants. Access to emergency healthcare has been facilitated and the Government has agreements with NGOs such as Mendicity, the Capuchin Day Service and Merchant's Quay Ireland to extend their services (meals, showers, information, wifi) to unaccommodated persons.

There is continuing engagement with providers on new accommodation and additional buildings will shortly be brought into use including three additional properties in the Dublin area to accommodate adult males. This will bring almost 400 bed spaces into use and will assist in reducing the numbers of persons that are unaccommodated at present.

The Government is taking a strategic approach to increasing supply through *Housing for All* - a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan designed to deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs up to 2030.

Supply is increasing and there is a strong pipeline of social and affordable housing projects which will also be of benefit to the private rental sector, currently challenged by undersupply. The Government also recently agreed additional actions to supplement *Housing for All* including with a particular focus on alleviating pressures in the private rental sector.

The current shortages in the private rental sector has an impact on many cohorts in need of housing. This includes over 5000 people who have been granted leave to remain in Ireland but remain in Direct Provision accommodation due to the overall housing pressures.



In particular, the substantial numbers of arrivals to Ireland, seeking protection, has had an unavoidable effect on the timelines for implementation of the 2021 White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service.

A review of the projected timelines for the implementation of the White Paper is currently underway. This review is reassessing the projections which underpinned the 2021 White Paper with respect to numbers of arrivals.

As part of the review process the Programme Board established to oversee transition to the new model has produced recommendations and proposals on how to advance the delivery of the new system of accommodation and supports for International Protection applicants. This will feed into a new set of proposals and timelines for implementation of the White Paper to be considered by government over the coming weeks.

While the review is ongoing, certain aspects of the White Paper are moving forward including in relation to children and young people, and integration into the community. Work is also underway in relation to accommodation including the development of the community accommodation model; delivery of dedicated accommodation for victims of trafficking and a focus on increasing state owned accommodation capacity.

I can assure you that Ireland will continue its whole-of-government approach to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and, in particular, to sourcing all forms of suitable accommodation.

I must emphasise that over the past year, communities across Ireland have demonstrated great solidarity to those who come here.

While there have been a number of protests and public meetings on the topic of immigration recently, there is a small minority whose intentions are to create division and engage in intimidation. The actions of a minority do not speak for the majority of Irish citizens.

Nonetheless, the Government recognises the need to listen to and communicate with local communities as new accommodation centres are opened and is working to develop a more effective method of sharing the necessary information.

I wish to assure you that I and my Government colleagues are committed in our efforts to alleviate the current pressures on accommodation and to implement the necessary measures to ensure a sustainable response into the future.

Yours sincerely,

Leo Varadkar T.D.,
Taoiseach