

**Direct Provision System in Ireland:
The Conflict between Government and Local
Communities and the Impact for Asylum Seekers**

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Direct Provision System in Ireland:
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Communities and the Impact for Asylum Seekers

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Table of Contents

	Page
List of Abbreviations	1
List of Tables/Figures	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1- Literature Review.....	9
Ireland`s place in the international protection system.....	9
Overview of Direct Provision System.....	11
Future of Direct Provision System.....	12
The Dispersal System	14
Considerable issues within DP system.....	17
Costs of DP Services and Public Opinion	22
Planning issues and protests.....	24
Cases Study: Lisdoonvarna, Oughterard and Tullamore.....	26
Local Communities Consultation.....	30
Chapter 2 – Research Methodology and Methods	33
Chapter 3 – Presentation of Data.....	41
Chapter 4 – Data analysis and Findings	45
Chapter 5 – Discussion.....	54
The Irish Reception System.....	54
Intergroup Conflict and Integration.....	56
Conclusion	60
Reflections	63
References.....	65
Appendices.....	77

List of Abbreviations

CSI	Community Sponsorship Ireland
DJE	Department of Justice and Equality
DP	Direct Provision
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
EU	European Union
FLAC	Free Legal Advice Centre
HSE	Health Services Executive
IGEES	Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service
IPA	International Protection Act
RIA	Reception and Integration Agency
IPAS	International Protection Accommodation Services
IPO	International Protection Office
IRC	Irish Refugee Council
OLRS	Oireachtas Library & Research Service
MASI	Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland
RCD	Reception Condition Directive
RIA	Reception and Integration Agency
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee

List of Tables/Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Applications for International Protection 2009-2019	10
Figure 2: Breakdown of current IPAS accommodation portfolio	15
Figure 3: Research process flow chart	35
Figure 4: Asylum seekers profile	42
Figure 5: Conflict mapping	58

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Abstract

The policy of dispersing asylum seekers around the country and accommodating them in direct provision centres was introduced over 20 years ago. The proposed research presents an inquiry about the Irish asylum system since its implementation and the challenges that arise within this policy, aiming recognise possible solutions for them.

This study also brings a layout of the conflict between the Government and the communities where accommodation centres are to be or are already implemented and the impact of this conflict and of the system for asylum seeker. This research utilises mixed method design with qualitative and quantitative sources using the existent information related with the topic and involving interviews with asylum seekers, community representatives and Governments official.

Despite the efforts from the Government to improve the direct provision policy and ally it to international human rights obligations and European reception standards, the system is failing in many aspects, with international protection seekers being the most affected, followed by the community in general. The results show an assertive necessity to improve the level of community consultation and the modification of the system for a more sustainable, humanitarian and lawful approach.

Introduction

Worldwide, at the end of 2019, a total of 79.5 million people has been forcibly displaced because of persecution, violence, conflict, human right violations or serious public order disturbance. Among these are nearly 26 million refugees and 4.2 million sought asylums (UNHCR, 2020).

It can be seen that ‘As the numbers of asylum seekers¹ reaching the Occident in the 1980s increased, so did Europe an anxiety and insistence on tightening borders’ (Moorehead, 2005, p. 48).

The Republic of Ireland has been a popular destination for immigrants for the last 50 years. Ever since, the country has committed to uphold international norms to guarantee the safety of those arriving in the State seeking protection. Nevertheless, the unprecedented increase in Ireland’s economy during the 1990s transformed the country with significant levels of migrants (Éinrí and White, 2008). As a result of this development, the necessity for a multi-level policy implementation to accommodate asylum seekers was vital.

¹ The term asylum seeker in this paper refers to those who have made a claim for refugee status, subsidiary protection or leave to remain, but where no final determination of the protection claim has been made. Hence, it will be also used the terms: ‘international protection applicants.’ and ‘protection applicants.’

A twin set of policies were devised as an interim solution. It was decided to disperse all new international protection seekers arriving to locations outside of Dublin and to introduce what became known as the policies of Direct Provision (DP) and Dispersal. The two policies while distinctly separate, are inextricable linked and operated in tandem (Cionnaith, 2012).

Thornton (2014) explains that the Irish policy to receive and accommodate people seeking international protection was introduced by the Irish Government as a pilot scheme in November 1999 in response to an accommodation crisis related to the massive increase of asylum seekers at that period of time, resulting in a state of homelessness among them, particularly in Dublin. Under this system, the Government is required to provide all seekers of international protection with shelter in different parts of the country along with other services.

Moreover, identified in this paper as one of the legal issues resulting from the direct provision policy, this research will analyse the conflict between local communities and the Irish Government founded on the absence of national legislation to consult the local communities in relation to location of direct provision accommodation centres. For these reasons and other failings in the system, there has been many studies and protests criticising it and calling for reforms or replacement of the same.

There is a lack of research in relation to the crescent conflict between communities and Irish Government as well as the impact for asylum seekers as they start living in these communities in dispute. It is therefore this gap in the literature that this research seeks to address. Focusing in answer questions like in what sense DP system is not fully satisfying Ireland's domestic and international obligations to protection applicants; what are the causes of the conflict between local communities and Government; what are the impacts for asylum seekers of this conflict and of direct provision system in general and what would be the possible satisfactory solutions to all parts involved in the matter.

For that purpose, a mix of approaches will be adopted, including chronological, rights-based and a deductive approach, utilising qualitative and quantitative methodology and an action research strategy to examine the direct provision system and dispersal policy in Ireland and the challenges within these programs.

This research also shows how the dispersal and direct provision policy works, the authorities responsible for these programs, the costs for the State and how it influences the public opinion in relation to asylum seekers, along with the main flaws within these two policies and its consequences for the actors involved as well as possible outcomes.

Furthermore, this study uses case study research to analyse the conflict that arises between the Government and local communities before and after the accommodation centres are installed in those communities. To demonstrate the causes and reactions of the conflict and how it impacts all actors involved, the case study is focused on three villages: Lisdoonvarna (Co. Clare), Oughterard (Co. Galway) and Tullamore (Co. Offaly).

This work aims to ensure a more effective reception system for those coming to the country seeking protection by highlighting one of the key flaws within the direct provision system and identifying possible solutions while asserting the necessity of the modification of this system, expecting, in this manner, that the State meet the universal and national standards of fairness and respect for those seeking international protection in Ireland.

Chapter 1- Literature Review

This chapter will present an analysis of the Irish system of accommodation for asylum seekers and operational organization of dispersal policy, including costs for the State and public opinion, legal framework in respect of the subject, procurement of services and the most important challenges faced by asylum seekers. Resulting in a straightforward understanding of the causes and effects of the conflict between the Irish Government and local communities.

Ireland`s place in the international protection system

By becoming a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention², Ireland became obliged to grant special protection to citizens of states that could not guarantee their human rights or physical security (Loyal and Quilley, 2018).

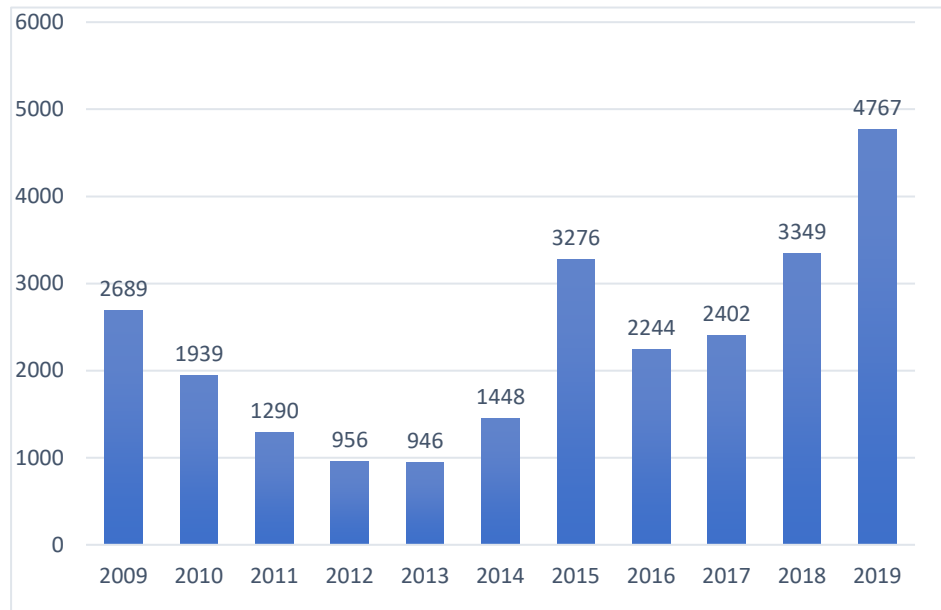
In 2018, Ireland adopted the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018³, placing the recast Reception Conditions Directive (the ‘recast RCD’) into domestic law. The recast RCD and the 2018 Regulations confirm the rights of applicants for international protection to have access to reception condition such as: housing, food, allowance, medical assistance, education, appeal mechanisms and employment.

² The Geneva Convention is related to the refugee status and all countries parties of the Convention are bound by an obligation under international law to grant asylum. Ireland became a part to the Convention in 1956.

³ (S.I. No 230 of 2018).

The number of asylum seekers in Ireland had its peak in 2002 with 11,634 applications before decrease dramatically to 946 in 2013 and increasing to 4,765 in 2019⁴ (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Applications for International Protection 2009-2019



Nevertheless, according to Dr Thornton (2014, p. 2) ‘The hallmark feature of the Irish reception system for asylum seekers has been the continual withdrawal and diminution of social rights on the grounds of preserving the integrity of immigration controls and protection of the welfare state from those who are viewed as not having a definitive right to be within the country. From a country of mass emigration to a country of net immigration, Ireland only began to experience appreciable asylum flows in the last decade.’

⁴ Department of Justice and Equality. ‘Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process’, *Advisory Group*, September 2020, p. 18.

Overview of Direct Provision System

The Direct Provision system was introduced in 2000 on an administrative rather than a legislative basis (OLRS, 2020). Under this scheme, those applying for refugee status, subsidiary protection or leave to remain in Ireland are furnished with bed and other ancillaries including food, education, health care and welfare at a week basis provided to adults and children.

Most of the protection applicants are from Pakistan, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Albania, South Africa, Bangladesh and Syria. Another 86 nationalities are also represented in the centres. Since the system of Direct Provision was first introduced, over 65,000 individuals and families have received assistance under the scheme.⁵

Both the direct provision system and the international protection application process are fully responsibility of the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) and the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS), formally known as Reception and Integration Agency (RIA),⁶ within the management of the International Protection Office (IPO).

The scheme of direct provision is not regulated by law for the most part, or even by secondary legislation, but rather by a series of directions, rules and

⁵ Charles Flanagan TD, Minister for Justice and Equality, 'Provision of Accommodation and Ancillary Services to Applicants for International Protection: Statements', *Dáil Éireann debate*, 13 November 2019.

⁶ For clarity purpose, in this research it will be used both names when referring to this agency.

regulations put into place by the executive which directs the scheme and administered by private companies which have no obligation to understand the rights of asylum seekers in Irish and international human rights law (FLAC, 2009).

Future of Direct Provision System

After years of campaigning by organisations and individuals, followed by numerous protests at centres around the country in 2014, the Government released a report, in 2015, (known as the ‘McMahon Report’), including 173 recommendations on a number of human rights violations pointed out by activists, regulators and the UNHCR Ireland to the Government. The Executive Officer/Press & Communications Officer of the Department of Justice and Equality, Colm Daly, in correspondence for this research, affirms that by June 2017, 98% of these recommendations were fully or partially implemented. The McMahon report represent the first review of the Direct Provision system since its establishment.

The subsequent attempt by the Government to improve the asylum system was in 2019 with the release of the previous mentioned “Report on Direct Provision and the International Protection Application Process”. The report acknowledges several key issues in the PD system.⁷

⁷ See more in: Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, *Report on Direct Provision and the International Protection Process*, December 2019, p. 3 (Chairman’s Preface).

Both reports are aligned with the notion that the direct provision system is not fit-for-purpose and recommend that it should be replaced. With the recent report even suggesting alternative models of reception in other jurisdictions, such as Portugal and Scotland, as a replacement for the Irish model.⁸

Colm Daly affirmed that the Program for Government contains a commitment to end the current system of Direct provision within the lifetime of the Government and replace it with a new international protection accommodation policy, based on a not-for-profit approach.

A report drafted by an Advisory Group, chaired by former Secretary General of the European Commission Dr Catherine Day and commissioned by former Justice Minister Charlie Flanagan, was published on 25 October 2020 setting out how a replacement to the direct provision system will be structured and outline the steps to achieve it. According to the report, the current system of accommodating asylum seekers should be ended and replaced by a three-stage system of State-run accommodation by mid-2023. The reports also suggest that after three months at a reception centre, applicants should be helped to move to own-door accommodation through a housing allowance model.⁹

⁸ Ibid, p. 13.

⁹ Cónal Thomas, 'Catherine Day: 'Continued political oversight' needed to end Direct Provision', *thejournal.ie*, 25 October 2020.

The Dispersal System

Once part of the Direct Provision system, protection applicants are accommodated in a reception centre (Balseskin Reception Centre) in Dublin for a period of approximately ten to fourteen days, which is given access to health, legal and welfare services during this period.¹⁰ Being, then, placed in accommodation centres dispersed around the country. A protection applicant cannot choose where he or she will be accommodated. They are under no obligation to utilize the DP services, having the liberty to move anywhere within the State (OLRS, 2020).

As of 2 August 2020, the IPAS accommodation portfolio comprised of a total of 45 centres (including reception centre) throughout 21 counties, with a contracted capacity of 7,345.¹¹ In addition, since 2018 hotel and guest house are being utilised to provide short-term accommodation (known as emergency accommodation) with temporary contracts (3 months) which are evaluated and renewed if required on expiry. Currently there are 36 Emergency Accommodation Centres with a contracted capacity of 2,059 individuals and a current occupancy of 1,527 residents.¹² Figure 2 illustrates the locations of the 45 Direct Provision centres by August 2020.

¹⁰ Reception and Integration Agency, Department of Justice and Equality, 'Reception, Dispersal & Accommodation', RIA Website. (Last accessed on 28 August 2020).

¹¹ Not all applicants for international protection avail of accommodation. Department of Justice and Equality. 'Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process', *Advisory Group*, September 2020, p. 118.

¹² Ibid.

Figure 2: Breakdown of current IPAS accommodation portfolio



Source: Adapted from data in Reception and Integration Agency, Department of Justice and Equality, *Monthly Report*, November 2018, p. 11.

Of those centres showed in the map, seven are State-owned and managed via private sector contracts. only three were built for the express purpose of accommodating protection applicants. The others comprise buildings which had a different initial purpose i.e. former hotels, guesthouses (B&B), hostels, former convents /nursing homes, a holiday camp, and a mobile home site.

These building placed in towns and villages around the country are bought or leased by the State after advertisements in national and local newspaper and RIA website instead of using formal competitive process, as set out in public procurement rules.¹³ The agency them select the “most appropriate hotels or guesthouses to meet the emergency need for accommodation services for people seeking international protection”¹⁴

To guarantee a balanced distribution of accommodation throughout the country, according to RIA’s website, the agency takes into consideration factors such as: the type of accommodation, the location of the accommodation, the local infrastructure (transport, schools, hospitals etc.), the local population and the numbers already accommodated by RIA/IPAS in the area, and the numbers to be accommodated.¹⁵

The idea behind the policy of dispersal, especially for programme refugees, is to share the resource responsibility more equally among a wide range of local authorities. The result has been secondary migration to areas where there were already established communities (Robinson et al., 2003). Whereas Ni Chiosain (2018) explains that, once the location is designated, the arrival of the asylum seekers to these places is basically announced only a few days beforehand. In addition, there is little or no consultation with public service

¹³ Such procurement procedure is also used for contract of suppliers of services for accommodation centres.

¹⁴ Sorcha Polack, ‘“Urgent” call for hotels and guesthouses to house asylum seekers’, *The Irish Times*, 14 January 2019.

¹⁵ Reception and Integration Agency, Department of Justice and Equality, ‘Background’, RIA website (Last accessed on 28 August 2020).

providers such as schools, doctors, and Community Welfare Officers. Neither the local population is consulted. The author concludes saying that ‘this lack of preparation on the ground not only resulted in the specific needs of asylum seekers being unmet from the start, but also serves to heighten local concerns and distrust’ (Ni Chiosain, 2018, p. 3).

Considerable issues within DP system

It was only in 2014 that the first challenge against Direct Provision system with a case of inhuman and degrading treatment went to court. In the case of *CA and TA v Minister for Justice and Equality*¹⁶ The High Court held that the applicants, a mother and her son, had failed to prove that their experience in the direct provision centre was founded as inhuman and degrading. However, the Judge found that the applicant’s right to respect for private and family life under article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) among other rights were breached by some aspects of the accommodation centre rules of the DP system. To remedy this breach, RIA emended the accommodation centre rules.¹⁷

Moreover, the contrast in services between the centres is still outstanding. Most of the accommodation centres provide a communal type of unit where most of the single people share rooms with two or more asylum seekers with different cultures and religions, while entire families share the same room.

¹⁶ [2014] IEHC 532.

¹⁷ See Reception and Integration Agency, Department of Justice and Equality, *House Rules and Procedures for Reception and Accommodation Centres*, January 2019.

Most centres are mixed in terms of gender, single people and families: 5 are family only and 8 are singles only. Another discrepancy in the services are noted in respect of cook facilities. Of the current contracted capacity including reception and emergency accommodation, around 52% of those in direct provision have access to their own cooking facilities.¹⁸

In August 2019 the National Standards for Accommodation was published with the requirement to meet all applicable minimum international standards in DP centres, such as: provide independent living (designated living space for families and self-catering); provide continuous training for staff, among other criteria. This will become legally binding in January 2021.¹⁹

Over the years, the length of time in which protection applicants receive a decision has been acknowledged by the Government as the single biggest problem to be overcome. While the majority of applicants have been in the system for less than two years, some have spent long years in direct provision.²⁰

International protection applicants also face practical barriers in relation to employment access. Around 63% of those who had gained the permission to

¹⁸ Department of Justice and Equality. 'Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process', *Advisory Group*, September 2020. p. 20.

¹⁹ Department of Justice and Equality, 'Statement on tenders for accommodation centres for international protection applicants', *Press Release*, 22 November 2019.

²⁰ Department of Justice and Equality. 'Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process', *Advisory Group*, September 2020, p. 49.

work have not been able to find a job. The reasons are essentially the remote accessibility of Direct Provision centres since they are mainly located in countryside areas, the difficulties in opening bank accounts and the inability to obtain drivers' licences.²¹

Several organizations have been reporting the uncertainty in the institutionalization of the vulnerability assessment process in Ireland as it occur at the initial contact with the IPAS/RIA in Baleskin Reception Centre and this has not been done with some of the asylum seekers who are sent directly to emergency accommodations (OLRS, 2020). The Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, in its reports, affirms that the vulnerability assessment services 'Goes nowhere near to meeting the current need.'²² The report recommends that this vulnerability assessment should be conducted on arrival and used to deliver targeted trauma-informed and gender-sensitive support to applicants.

Other significant challenge international protection applicants on DP centres face is correlated to the recent and ongoing world's virus epidemic, COVID-19. On 23 March 2020, the Department of Justice and Equality and the Health Services Executive (HSE) had jointly put in place a range of measures to

²¹ Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, *Report on Direct Provision and the International Protection Process*, December 2019, pp. 34, 36.

²² Ibid, p. 58.

address any possible spread of COVID-19 among residents in accommodation centres. These measures include:²³

- Provision for self-isolation facilities in each centre and offsite self-isolation when a resident is suspected or confirmed to have the virus.
- Accommodation for a maximum of three non-family members to a room.
- Increased capacity to support physical and social distancing.
- Regular communications and information on public health advice to residents and centre managers.

All accommodation centres including emergency centres have been asked to complete contingency plans for COVID-19. IPAS has been reviewing the individual plans to ensure shared learning and best practice across all centres. To support social distancing and to reduce contacts in the centres, no visitors are allowed entry into centres during the COVID-19 emergency.²⁴ Furthermore, a comprehensive programme of COVID-19 testing by the HSE is underway across all accommodation centres housing asylum seekers and refugees in the State.²⁵

The conflict between residents of communities where DP centres are implemented or are in phase to be implemented and the Government became more compelling because of these encounters and even more since the pandemic.

²³ The Executive Officer/Press & Communications Officer of the Department of Justice and Equality, Colm Daly, in correspondence for this research.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Department of Justice and Equality, 'Statement in relation to Contingency Planning for Accommodation Centres', *Press Release*, 23 March 2020.

Some local communities presumed that all residents of DP centre had COVID-19.²⁶ That attitude occurs mainly because of miscommunication or lack of information in respect of the outbreak in direct provision centre.

The international protection applicant and member of the Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI) Jackie Sthe, in commentary for that research about the pandemic situation in the DP centre where she resides, Esplanade Hotel in Bray, Co. Wicklow, explained that only two residents of the DP centre were tested positive for the virus, however, the Government stated that there was an ‘outbreak’ there, reinforcing the stigma asylum seekers suffer by the local communities around the country. She added revealing that:

‘When the notice of the outbreak came out, there were few people outside of the hotel and they wanted that all residents put on the face mask when live the hotel as if only people living there had the COVID-19 and all the other houses in Bray could not be infected, they were looking at us as if we were the one bringing the virus to the community when the reality was that there were only two cases in the centre.’

The Irish Refugee Council (IRC) released, on 10 August 2020, a major report on Direct Provision and the COVID-19 pandemic. the report includes quali-

²⁶ Sorcha Pollak, ‘Half of people in direct provision ‘unable’ to social distance’, *The Irish Times*, 8 August 2020.

tative and quantitative data and is based on a survey completed by approximately 418 people living in 63 different Direct Provision and emergency centres. (5.4% of the population of Direct Provision). The survey discovered, among other things, that 55% felt of respondents unsafe during the pandemic and 50% were unable to socially distance themselves from other residents during the pandemic.

Costs of DP Services and Public Opinion

Thornton (2014) explains that direct provision was introduced in order to prevent asylum seekers from accessing social assistance payments, since, prior to the introduction of the system, asylum seekers had access to the welfare system on the same basis as Irish citizens. As part of the incorporated McMahon Report recommendations, the current welfare budget is €38.80 per adult and €29.80 per child. It is important note that protection applicants who do not avail of DP accommodation cannot claim allowances.

The Advisory Group report (2020) outlines the total expenditure by the State on Direct Provision in 2019 as being €178.5 million (staff costs related to the operation of the system are not included).²⁷ Thus, it has been reported that, during a period of two decades, the State has spent more than €1.3 billion on accommodation of asylum seekers. Most of it going directly to private DP

²⁷ Department of Justice and Equality. 'Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process', *Advisory Group*, September 2020, p. 90.

accommodation providers.²⁸ According to the IGEES spending review, that significant total cost is a reflect of the higher costs of new contracts for direct provision services and increased use of emergency accommodation due to high demand of existing DP centres. On average, the cost of emergency accommodation is €100 per person per night versus €35.50 in DP centres.²⁹

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) published a report in 2018 highlighting the importance of the economy in understanding attitudes to immigration and diversity. The reports note that public views on the impact of immigration is directly related with the economic situation of the State. The Advisory Group report (2020) complements explaining that it also differs between urban and rural residents.

The controversy established in relation of DP costs is due to an understanding by the local population that while the costs of housing asylum seekers are increasing and benefiting private property owners, the high demand for emergency accommodation is aggravating the housing crisis. In addition, the public view is that asylum seekers are defrauding the welfare system and swelling housing lists at huge cost to the taxpayer (Ni Chiosain, 2018). Such matters aggravate the tension between the Government and the local communities.

²⁸ Mark Hilliard, 'In 20 years, Direct provision has cost Ireland €1.3bn: Is there a better alternative?', *Irish Times*, 21 November 2019.

²⁹ Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service Unit, Department of Justice and Equality, 'Direct Provision: Overview of current accommodation expenditure', *Spending Review 2019*, August 2019, p. 19.

Planning issues and protests

On 17 December 2015, Mr. Alan Kelly, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, signed into law the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No 582 of 2015). These regulations had the effect of removing the need for planning permission to change the use of prearranged premises, such as hotels, motels, hostels, guesthouses, holiday accommodation, convents, monasteries, etc. Providing overnight accommodation to accommodation centres or emergency reception and orientation centres for refugees, applicants for international protection and persons subject to deportation orders.³⁰ Such a change of use is now classified as exempted development (OLRS, 2020).

The Planning and Development Act allows for an application to be reviewed under its section 5 to stipulate whether a particular property falls within a category of exempted development. However, prospective complainers have no right to challenge the category itself. Thus, a member of the public cannot challenge the change of use of the property under such planning law. They are subject to regular planning ruling instead.

An exemplification case is the challenge brought to Leitrim Council on May 2019 to confirm the status of the Shannon Key West Hotel in Rooskey as a hotel and its designation as an exempted property. The decision was that the

³⁰ See *Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2015*. Available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2001/si/600/made/en/print#sched2>.

named hotel Abbey Castle is legally entitled to commence operation of that intended use in the premises (emergency accommodation centre).³¹

The adverse reaction provoked by the arrival of asylum seekers in towns and villages throughout Ireland and the attempts to reverse these arrivals in many ways happens since the implementation of the Direct Provision system. Nevertheless, there has been an intensification of protests and attacks in the past two years.

The contract of hotels to provide Direct Provision services prompted arson attacks at the Caiseal Mara Hotel in Moville, Co Donegal, in November 2018³², and at the Shannon Key West Hotel in Rooskey, Co Leitrim, in January and February 2019³³. In October 2019, Ballinamore, other village of Co Leitrim, held Community protests and challenged the Government decisions to set up accommodation centre in the area.³⁴ Towards the end of October 2019, the Government announced plans to accommodate 38 asylum seekers in the Achill Head Hotel for a period of three months. The short notice decision was made without consultation of local people, resulting in a group of approximately 150 people protesting on a rota basis 24 hours-a-day.³⁵

³¹ Orla Ryan, 'Fears over legal challenge 'disrupting' asylum seekers led to Direct Provision centre being scrapped', *The Journal*, 6 May 2019.

³² Stephen Maguire, 'Donegal hotel earmarked for asylum seekers set on fire', *The Irish Times*, 25 November 2018.

³³ Sorchá Pollak, 'Rooskey fire was premeditated and carefully planned, says Garda', *The Irish Times*, 12 February 2019.

³⁴ Eileen Magnier, 'Leitrim group protesting over plan to house asylum seekers', *RTE News*, 21 October 2019.

³⁵ Rosita Boland, 'There will always be two groups in Achill now', *The Irish Times*, 7 December 2019.

Cases Study: Lisdoonvarna, Oughterard and Tullamore

Lisdoonvarna

In February 2018, Lisdoonvarna, a small town in North Clare with the population of around 800 people, held a public meeting to vote in relation to Government's plan to convert the King Thomond Hotel in a Direct Provision centre, after the owner of the hotel had said that he would consider the decision. The residents main concern was the insufficient services to support the expected population increase in the small village. 93 per cent of the 212 people present at the meeting voted against the plan.³⁶

Regardless, the hotel owner proceeded with the contract with RIA to accommodate 115 protection applicants at the location. The first 30 people arrived in March. The Department of Justice & Equality assured that there would be only single women and families being accommodated, however, by the end of 2018, there were single male protection applicants amongst the 117 residents of DP accommodation centre, exceeding contracted capacity.³⁷

Since the vote had no statutory standing, it had no influence in the Government's decision to establish the Direct Provision Centre in Lisdoonvarna. However, despite the lack of communication, it was sub intended that the Department of Justice & Equality has a moral obligation of give guarantees to

³⁶ Owen Rya, 'Lisdoonvarna Direct Provision Centre exceeding capacity', *The Clare Champion*, 18 December 2018.

³⁷ Ibid.

the local population or comply with accorded. The hostility showed at the beginning reversed to a welcoming feeling as the population met the new residents and it has been reported that the international protection applicants have been integrating well with the local community.³⁸

Oughterard

Starting on 14 September 2019, locals organised round-the-clock protests blocking the entry at the former Connemara Gateway Hotel, in Oughterard, Co. Galway, which was due to accommodate 200 international protection applicants. The developer of the company set to run the new Direct Provision centre once it was operational, Seán Lyons, reported to local authorities and to DJE his concerns of arson attacks at the premisses. However, he was told there were no resources available to deal with the protest.³⁹

After weeks of protests, the population of the small town, which has around 1,300 habitants, celebrated after Seán Lyons's decision of withdraw the tender for the new DP centre stating that the decision was in light of the lack of support from the State and in interest of the safety of all stakeholders.

³⁸ Gordon Deegan, 'Fear turns to friendship as Lisdoonvarna welcomes asylum seekers', *The Irish Times*, 7 August 2018.

³⁹ Pat, McGrath, 'Tender for Oughterard direct provision centre withdrawn', *RTE*, 1 October 2019.

The DJE stated that ‘it is disappointment that the tender has been withdrawn’ and the Minister of Justice, Charlie Flanagan, said that the nature of DP services had been totally mischaracterised, however, it is in line with EU law.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, it is evident that, in this case, the Government had ignored the attempts of the community and of the contractor to have their claims attended. The Department were accused by both parties of lack of consultation. There was no approach on the situation for the part of the Government and the protests had the potential to grow to a more difficult and problematic state if the tender had not been withdrawn.

Tullamore

In February 2020, the confirmation of the opening of a new DP centre in Tullamore, Co Offaly, brought mixed feelings to the population of 14,600 inhabitants, due to misinformation and confusion as the former Marian Hostel was being converted from 35-bed hostel to a modern facility intended for up to 168 asylum seekers.

A meeting between DJE officials and local representative was held and the Department explained that together with Marian Hostel, the protection applicants were going to be accommodated on a phased-in-basis in three other

⁴⁰ Hayley Halpin, ‘It is disappointing’: Govt reacts to decision to withdraw tender for Oughterard Direct Provision centre’, *thejournal.ie*, 1 October 2019.

properties located beside and across the road of the hostel.⁴¹ Furthermore, it was reported that the officials also said that they were not able to hold prior consultations about the accommodation centre because the contracts had not yet been signed.⁴²

As the anger and frustration of Tullamore community continued to escalate and a protest with a small number of people occurred in the street where the centre was implemented, members of the Offaly County Council and Independent TD for Offaly, Carol Nolan, called on the department to suspend plans to open the DP centre in the location. The Deputy affirmed ‘We (the community) want to play our part. Of that, there is no doubt. But we must do so in a practical and consultative environment where people’s concern around access to services and the many other matters that will come into play, can be addressed.’⁴³

Even though the campaign against the opening of the DP centre in the Tullamore case was minor when compared to other communities like in Oughterard, the uncertainty and lack of collaboration of the Government, who only accepted to meet with the local representatives after their solicitation, was evidence of the pattern approach used by the Government when installing a new direct provision accommodation centre in rural locations in Ireland.

⁴¹ Conor Gallagher, ‘Tullamore direct provision: ‘This won’t be another Oughterard’’, *The Irish Times*, 21 February 2020.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Justin Kelly, ‘Offaly TD calls for suspension of direct provision plans in Tullamore’, *Offaly Express*, 19 February 2020.

Local Communities Consultation

These acts have been attributed to a number of local concerns, including issues related to the lack of consultation prior to making the decision of the implementation of the centres, and whether local services could support that they were focused on issues such as the lack of local consultation prior to making the decision to locate the centre in the area and whether local services could cope with the influx of the new residents. In addition, some activists also expressed anxieties in relation to the DP system itself.

However, it has been reported that a minority of protesters used xenophobic and anti-immigration arguments reinforced via platforms such as social media, which led more community tension. It is asserted that ‘the feelings voiced showed the ignorance of the issues at stake and the insularity still prevalent in some parts of Ireland. Many people, including local politicians, spoke openly of fears that asylum seekers would bring diseases like AIDS, TB and hepatitis into the community. They were worried that crime rates would rise, that begging would increase on the streets, and that local women and children would not be safe. They were also concerned that property prices would slump as a result of the arrival of asylum seekers and that tourism would be badly affected.’ (Ní Chiosáin, 2018, p. 3).

There is no legal obligation by the owner of the properties or the IPAS/RIA to consult with local communities and consider their concerns or to notify them when the proposed DP centre is classified as exempted development and

is to be used for the purpose of accommodate international protection applicants. Thus, even though the majority of the population has legit concerns in relation to the arrival protection applicants in small villages around the country, those communities have no legal rights to enforce the Government to engage with them or to consider local suggestions.

When asked about the matter, the Government's representative, Colm Daly, stated: *'For commercial sensitivity reasons, engagement with local communities about accommodation centres takes place after contracts are signed with operators. However, this process continues to be considered in order to provide relevant information to local communities as early as possible. All decisions in relation to the use of premises are taken in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract in place.'*

Jacoby (2007), when evaluating conflict, states that conflicts emerges from the absence of generally agreed upon and authoritative regulation. The author argues that existent structures, previous experiences and socio-historical trajectories are important in understanding the changes in behaviour that commonly results from, or coincide with, the impact of conflict engagement upon groups, alliances and systems.

Provided that the causes and effects of the conflict between the local communities and the Irish Government are aligned with issues in communication, as explored in this chapter, the contact hypothesis, studied in psychology and

other social sciences, holds that at some point in the intergroup conflict process, contact is inevitable and suggests that the resolution of any conflict may occur when gathering people with different identity to talk about issues can reduce stereotypes and increase friendliness (Ellis and Maoz, 2012).

Nevertheless, Hewstone et. al 2002 study, cited in Arnold, Ryan and Quinn (2018) argue that when intergroup conflict is severe, other avenues besides contact/engagement/communication may be important in mitigating the worst effects of the conflict. They suggest developing each groups knowledge of the other and encouraging individuals involved to understand the conflict from the out-group's perspective to solve the conflict.

Chapter 2 – Research Methodology and Methods

This chapter will discuss the methodology that were considered for this research project and the reason a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods was chosen. An outline of the idea proposed for this project will be given, and a description of the approach adopted in this study and methods of data collection and analysis is provided. It will also be considered the limitations and challenges in undertaken this study, along with ethical considerations for the participants of this research.

The main aim of this research was to explore the conflict between local communities and Irish Government as one of the flaws of the system to receive and accommodate asylum seekers in Ireland. This study and consequently, the methodology, has been evaluated by four sources:

- Review of documentation
- Consultation with authority informant
- Consultation with community representatives
- Interview with asylum seekers

Moreover, the idea was to analyse the Direct Provision system in Ireland and its mechanisms while comprehend how is the interaction between the actors involved and their perception about the conflict. For that, relevant literature on the subject was examine, including reports, research papers, observations from academics, NGOs, practitioners, and community representatives, media

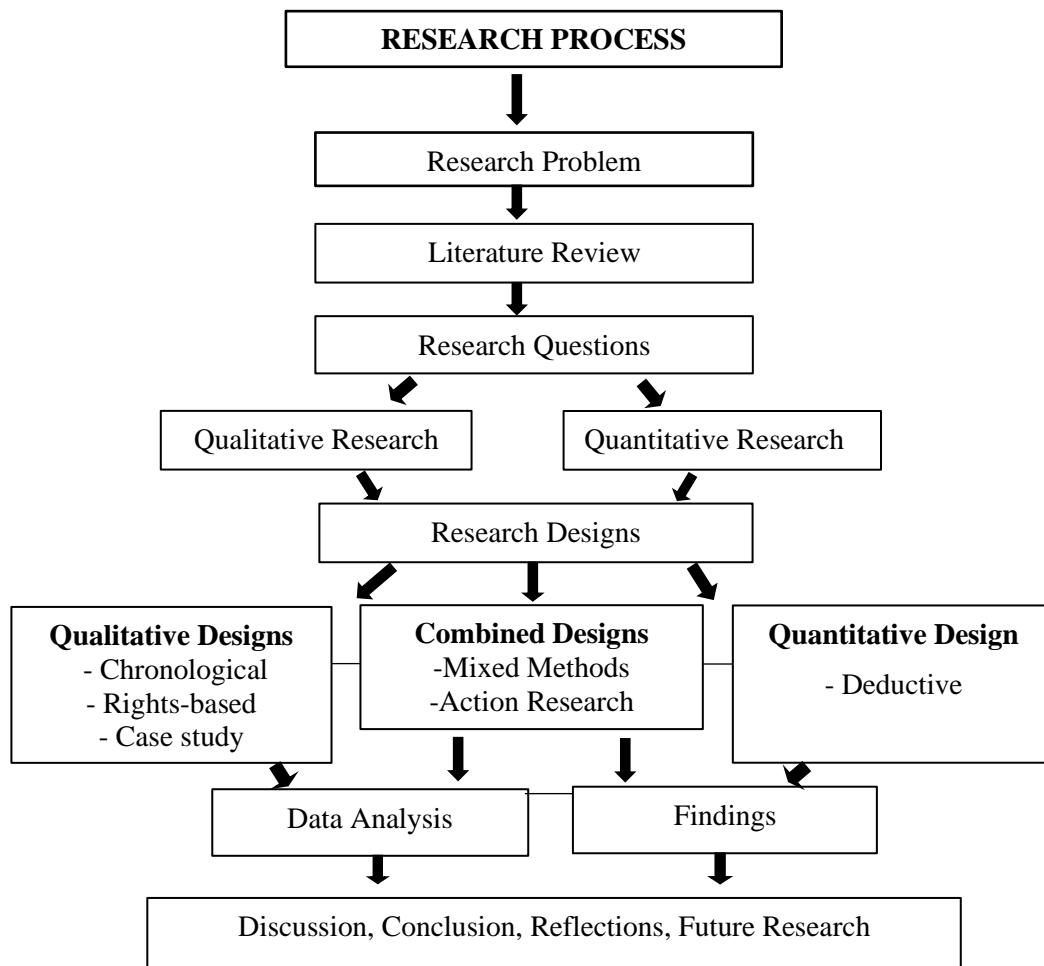
articles, published documents from the RIA as well as interviews with asylum seekers in different stages of their international protection process to obtain status in the country. Correspondence with representants of the local communities and an official from the Department of Justice and Equality were exchanged via email and video chat.

Throughout the research process there was care in ensuring that all research stages were conducted in an ethical manner. An ethical review form was completed and submitted to the Independent College Dublin Research Ethics Committee in advance of carrying out research. This was necessary given the potential for vulnerability of asylum seekers. Moreover, local authorities and communities are guided by moral and legal conducts. Therefore, all participants were instructed verbally and or in writing about their rights, confidentiality/anonymity matters and further information (see Appendix I) along with the requirement of an indication/sign consent previous participation (see Appendix II).

This work utilises mixed method design with qualitative and quantitative sources where approaches adopted are the case study research, chronological, rights-based and deductive approach. The extensive research strategy chosen was Action Research because of its potential to engage with all actors involved.

The responses for the fundamental questions in respect of the nature of the conflict studied were the main reason to select these approaches and methods. These questions are synthetised into two: Why local communities and the Government are in dispute and what are the effects and possible solutions of this conflict. Figure 3 displays a visual procedure through qualitative and quantitative sources utilized in this research.

Figure 3: Research process flow chart



The mix methods model is a procedure for collecting, analysing and ‘mixing’ both quantitative and qualitative data as a research process in a single study, to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2002). The justification for this methodology is that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient by themselves to capture the trends and details of the situation. Therefore, when combined, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and permits a more complete data collection and analysis (Green et. all, 1989).

For the quantitative section of this study, the approach utilized is deductive. Wilson (2010) states that the major concern of this approach is ‘developing a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theory, and then design a research strategy to test the hypothesis’ (Wilson, 2010). Deductive means reasoning from the particular to the general. If a causal relationship or link seems to be implied by a particular theory or case example, it might be true in many cases. A deductive design might test to see if this relationship or link did obtain on more general circumstances (Gulati, 2009).

This research is based in two hypotheses: a) The conflict between the community and the Government directly effects the asylum seekers; and b) The conflict is essentially structured by communication issues. To add validity to these hypotheses, the research design chosen was quantitative interviews with asylum seekers and community’s representative.

That interview method is similar to qualitative interviews because they involve some researcher/respondent interaction. The difference is the possibility to collect data in a way that allows a more in-depth communication with open ended questions while numbering and processing variables. This method also ensures the protection of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Nonetheless, this research is for the most part a qualitative research. Exploiting one of the most commonly used qualitative approach in social study, the chronological method. Mills et al (2010) explains that a chronological order applies to case study research in several ways and refers it as a pattern of organization (used by date in this research) in order to gather information according to a timely sequence of events.

The rationale to use this method is its structure, allowing the demonstration of how ideas have progressed over time. In this study, this approach is used to understand the legal and systematic progress Ireland had in relation to receiving and accommodating asylum seekers as well as the evolution of the conflict examined.

In relation to case study research method, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, cited in Harrison et al (2017), captures the key requisites in context of research when singly describing case study research as: 'An intensive analysis of an

individual unit (as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment.’

In addition, Yin (2009) explains that case study research focusing on answering questions that ask how or why, and where the control of present events are minor by the researcher. In chapter one, the case study research was adopted when examining the three communities where conflicts between locals and Irish authorities occurred in different levels and outcomes. It was also applied in respect of the consultations and interviews.

Therefore, in utilizing this method, this study focused to reach the fundamental goal of the case study research, which is to conduct an in-depth analysis of an issue, within its context with a view to understand the issue from the perspective of the participants (Harrison et al, 2017).

This study was first projected with the intention to utilise the case study research as a unique approach, however, after considering that this work would not be limited to a particular organisation, place or event, but rather on a group of communities and organizations attempting to modify a Government policy and the response of Government actors to such attempts and their policy-making role and influence to a particular group (asylum seekers). In this sense, it was concluded that the study is broader than a traditional case study approach, thus the utilisation of more approaches would be necessary.

Another qualitative method used in this research is the right-based approach, most convenient considering that there is a differentiation of power between the actors involved in the conflict and impacted by it. This approach is defined by the UNHCR as ‘a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights.’

The rights based approach was utilised in this study because it considers that the legal framework of a country in respect to immigration as to be based in civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in order to address the challenges faced by individuals and or the community as part of the their development process, with coincide with the deems of all the reports cited in this study.

A total of 12 international protection applicants in deferent phases of their applications and living in different counties around Ireland were invited to take part in the study. A selection of community representatives were also invited by email to take part in this study and 3 individuals responded to the invitation. In addition, 8 questions were sent by email to the Department of Justice and Equality and answered for a representant of DJE (see Appendix IX).

Mixed methods research provides strength to balance the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell, 2002). However, this study presented limitations, being the most relevant the percentage of the sample⁴⁴ limiting the data to a small number of individuals and organisations, thus, the research cannot be generalised to the larger population.

The study was also limited by the fact that there is a culture of fear, uncertainty, isolation and marginalisation, which is systematic in direct provision policy (Hogan, 2015). It was perceived in some participants the fear of ramifications or repercussions if engage in this study. Highlighting the importance of ethical approval and information & consent forms.

⁴⁴ The global virus outbreak had a directly influence in the limitation of sample/data. More details in chapter 5 - 'Discussion'

Chapter 3 – Presentation of Data

The process of thematic analysis was used to select topics related to the connection between the actors involved in the conflict analysed and the implications for asylum seekers of the conflict and of the Direct Provision and the dispersal system. The topics included: 1) Hospitality in the country; 2) Housing system and DP centre conditions; 3) Accommodation facilities; 4) COVID-19 Government measures; 5) Formal complaints; 6) Concerns related to DP system; and 7) Community and Government engagement. An interview guide (see appendices B, C and D) based on these topics was prepared in advance to give direction and focus to the research.

The first part of the data presentation relates to the interviews with international protection applicants who live in DP centres around the country. I interviewed 12 asylum seekers between the ages of 18 and 43. The selection of the participants was not difficult since I currently work at a legal office dealing with immigration matters including international protection application. All asylum seekers interviewed were my clients and I had access to contact details such as phone number, email and address. They were chosen according to their location. Amongst the 12 asylum seekers, 7 were interviewed by phone. In those cases, verbal instructions related to information & consent were in place first along with the forms being sent by email prior to the call so that they could have access to it during the interview. The other interviews were conducted in the office.

In relation asylum seekers, an introductory selection of questions was utilised to help establish the profile of the participants prior the 10 pre-established questions. The following table is used to demonstrate the data collect with the preliminary questions (see Appendix III). Figure 4 illustrates the results from the data collected from the introductory questions.

Figure 4: Asylum seekers profile

Participants	Country of Origen	Family	Location in IRL	Moved DP Centre	Length of Time (months)
Participant 1	Zimbabwe	No	Dublin/Finglas	No	10
Participant 2	Swaziland	Yes	Dublin/Lucan	No	25
Participant 3	Georgia	No	Dublin/Finglas	No	4
Participant 4	Nigeria	No	Lisdoonvarna	No	14
Participant 5	DR Congo	No	Dublin 2	Yes	10
Participant 6	Nigeria	No	Tullamore	No	23
Participant 7	Togo	Yes	Limerick	No	10
Participant 8	Zimbabwe	No	Wicklow	Yes	14
Participant 9	South Africa	Yes	Dublin/Finglas	No	7
Participant 10	South Africa	No	Galway	Yes	22
Participant 11	DR Congo	No	Wicklow	Yes	26
Participant 12	Nigeria	Yes	Lisdoonvarna	No	10

It is important to sign some points in respect to the table above: 100% of the participants who said that they had family members, have between 2 and 4 family members.

70% of the participants that said yes when asked if they had ever moved to another accommodation centre said that they moved more than once, the first time would be the only reception centre, the Baleskin Reception Centre, located in Dublin, Finglas Village. Three participants still live in that centre (being 4 months the shortest time residing there between these three participants) even though that DP centre was planned to accommodate asylum seekers in the first instance of their arrival in the Country and while their permanent location is to be decided.

In relation of the length of time, it can be perceived in the table that 40% of the participants are waiting for their decision of their protection application more than the 16 months stipulated by the authorities.

The gender representation was 60% female and 40% male, and the average age of participants were 24. All participants had a good understanding of English. It was important in order to avoid barriers limitation. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, the results were compared and contrasted with the aims and objectives of the study and with the selected literature and correspondences with community representatives and Government authorities.

The second presentation of data is in relation of the correspondence with the Government Official and the three community representatives who accepted to take part in this research: a representative from the Irish Refugee Council, Rory O'Neill, who spoke on behalf of the Dublin community, a representative of Offaly council, on behalf of the Tullamore community, and an independent councillor of the Oughterard community. The two last mentioned participants opted for anonymity. Of these three, two interviews were conducted by video chat and the other occurred in the same manner as with official from DJE, via emails exchange.

Moreover, the first point of communication with community representatives was in relation to direct provision policy (see Appendix X) and it was found that 100% of community representatives were in favour of not only the change of the Direct Provision system but the replacement of the same. Two out of three agreed that the attacks and protest were not the best endeavour to deal with the conflict between Government and local communities and the other person in favour of these type of actions justified himself saying that *'this was the way used in many countries and for many years to deal with the Government and it as given results.'*

Due to the nature of the subject studied, the analysis of data collected with the interviews is better presented in the next chapter using transcriptive qualitative research findings.

Chapter 4 – Data analysis and Findings

The results were developed according with categories based on the 7 topics mentioned in the previous chapter. Utilizing data from the three conflict cases explored in chapter 1, the interviews with the asylum seekers, the interviews with the community representatives and the correspondence exchanged with the Government official (which most information was presented in the literature review). The findings are presented as the following:

1) Hospitality in the country

Ten out of twelve asylum seekers interviewed, felt welcomed when arrived in Ireland. However, when asked how was the community that they are living treated them when they arrived, 80% of participants said that they felt some degree of hostility/discrimination by some community individual.

Most of the asylum seekers preferred not to explain their comment, nonetheless, there was one participant who stated that *‘the sense of ‘this is not our place’ is felt everywhere we go, and they do not need to say anything, it comes from their [referring to some community individuals] looks, their gestures.’* She adds saying: *“But it is still better than the felling of my life being in danger that I had when I was in my country.”* One of the community representatives commented on this revealing that *‘the hostility comes even from the political environment. I know people who refers to asylum seekers as ‘Ireland’s leeches’ and try to difficult the integration between them and the community.’*

It was found that even after two decades of the implementation of the direct provision system in Ireland, lack of appropriate strategies to receive people in need of protection international in Ireland is still common, arising to degrading situations to asylum seekers.

2) Housing system and DP centre's conditions

The housing system was one of the most common concerns expressed by the asylum seekers. 90% of the participants share the room with at least one other person. One participant voiced that: *'Even though Ireland has a better housing system than the one in the United Kingdom (where there is an immigration detention policy for asylum seekers⁴⁵), it is quite challenging living in hotels for months and share a room with strangers. I do not have any privacy.'* Another participant said: *'It is too much moving from one place to other all the time.'*

There was no evidence from the interviews to suggest that there is interaction between the residents of the accommodation centres, or even between the residents and staff and managers whatsoever.

One of the participants from King Thomas Hotel, In Lisdoonvarna stated that sometimes the hotel is full, giving the interpretation that as a per of August

⁴⁵ This policy is the home office practice of detaining foreign nationals for the purpose of immigration control utilized in some European countries. See more at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/immigration-detention-in-the-uk/>

2020 (when the interviews took place) the hotel was again exceeding contracted capacity as presented in the case study about this village.

In relation to the conditions of DP centres, around 65% of participants said that it was good, followed by the comments such as '*but there is no social distance*' and/or '*but it could be better*' which gives the perception of fear of conflict with authorities along with the notion of not to sound ungrateful.

3) Accommodation facilities

The findings for that topic are especially pertinent in the sense that 100% of asylum seeker participants in this study who did not have cook facilities in their accommodation, when asked if there is anything that could be modified to improve the place they are in, expressed that would be great if they could be allowed to cook their own food. In addition, four out of twelve asylum seekers have a full self-catering facility in their accommodation and all of them expressed gratitude in relation to be able to cook. One participant from Wicklow, exemplifies the difficulty in relation to food: '*We do not have proper food for our kids, they serve salads in the afternoon and we know that the kids won't eat salad. That is a big challenge.*'

The lack of cooking facilities is evidence that the direct provision system is not a suitable long-term system for those living under these conditions. It was found that independent living conditions are essential for the physical and mental health of people living under direct provision.

4) COVID-19 Government measures

Nine asylum seekers interviewed had got tested for COVID-19 and two stated that they had a date to do the test and one stated that he did not have got tested nor had a date to do the test as a per of August 2020. One participant from Baleskin Reception Centre, in Finglas village, when asked her opinion about the government's response to COVID-19 in direct Provision centres, expressed that *'there was outbreak there. I stayed isolated...bad things happen when you are isolated.'* When asked to comment what type of bad things, she stayed in silence as if she had regretted saying the previous comment.

100% of asylum seekers stated that there was not social distancing being followed in the DP centre they were at. An asylum seeker explained that everyone in the accommodation centre she was in, were put in isolation without notice and she was very confused about why it occurred, evidencing that the Department of Justice and Equality measures including the distribution of public health information to all centres, if putted in practice, did not had the expected effect.

One of the representatives from the communities said that *'The Government's response seems to be improving. However, a lot of mistakes were made across the sectors[...] there was some bad decision making, there was some bad communication [...] and I understand how these mistakes were made and the consequences of these mistakes. Especially because the lack of testing in first instance and the lack of awareness of people's vulnerabilities. [...] Direct*

provision does not allow the implementation of measures such as social distance and putting people in self isolation.'

5) Formal complains

The last question asked to asylum seekers was if they have ever made any formal complaints about an accommodation they stayed at and if yes, to whom and why. The rationale behind that questions was to evaluate the level of self-confidence as an individual integrant of the Irish society as well as the level of fear of conflict with authorities with the assumption that since they are in a process to decide if they would get status in the country or not, the fear of doing something that would affect that decision is implicit.

Eleven out of twelve asylum seekers interviewed were emphatic in saying that they had never made any formal complains. Nor to IPAS or any person dealing with management of the Direct Provision centre they are living. The only person who said that he had made a formal complaint already stated that it was in relation to his wife who was pregnant and they wanted to change accommodation because there was no space for them when the baby is born. He commented: *'You said that I could call you if I needed something, so I called two months ago and explained the situation and you advised me to contact the Reception and Integration Agency and if they do not help me, I should go to the ombudsman office. I contacted the first agency to ask them to move us, but it was taking very long so I went to ombudsman office. After some time, they finally moved us to other accommodation.'*

This case can be used as an example of the lack of information by the authorities responsible along with a flaw in the dispersal system as it was found in this study that appropriated accommodation to asylum seekers are not being selected respecting their rights to privacy and family privileges as stipulated in the UDHR articles.

6) Concerns related to DP system

All asylum seekers participants described their daily routine of living in Direct Provision with words such as ‘monotonous’, ‘repetitive’ and ‘depressing’. One participant described how direct provision has impacted her mental health: *‘I cry a lot and I don’t feel happy in doing anything. Living in here is depressing.’* She commented that *‘there is a board in the reception with some activities to do but I don’t know how I will be treated if I show up in certain places, so I decide not to go. I’m just waiting for the decision.’* Referring to her international protection application.

Another participant who lives in an accommodation centre in Co Galway, when asked how was living there, said: *‘I am currently very depressed. We are in the middle of nowhere and the doctor that comes there once a week is only for screening. To stay busy I tried to apply for 6 weeks for classes in Carrickmacross, but always an excuse, classes full, or not space to host class, or not enough people yet...I feel like I am just another number in the system.’*

The first question asked to community representatives was what would be the main concerns in relation to direct provision accommodation centres. All three participants stated the location of DP centres as one of the concerns, followed by the lack of proper access to school and work (mentioning the distance of DP centres from schools and workplaces) and lack of proper community integration support.

The justification used to address this topic was that the Government, in deciding the location of accommodation centres, need to take into consideration the distance of that prospect location to services such as schools and thinking in transportations strategies to allow asylum seekers under the labour market access, permission to get to their work. These concerns expressed by the community in relation to asylum seekers are within the causes of the conflict with the Government as discussed in previous chapters.

7) Government, Community and asylum seekers engagement

For this section, three questions were asked to community representatives. The first question was how is the communication between themselves and the DJE is, with emphases in knowing if the response is immediate. In second instance, they were asked their view in how the Department could engage with communities where asylum seekers are housed. In the third question it was asked what could be done to ensure a better interaction between asylum seekers and local communities and have both needs attended. Two out of the

three participants said that the government response had improved and is satisfactory. The other participant stated that the communication between their council and DJE is not enough to address all concerns.

Rory O'Neill, who spoke on behalf of Irish Refugee Council and Dublin community, expressed that this interaction is a very delicate piece: *'No community that has a PD centre in it has objected after the fact, they have all been kind of happy to it to an extent, It only happened in Morville, Donegal, Oughterard and two others...because in the other cases they talked with the community properly...not justifying the Department of Justice or anything, but it is a delicate balance, you need to talk to the community but you also have to be aware to not given them advance notice so they can do stuff (referring to protest and attacks). That is why is important to go in (the community) and talk to the right people and make them know who are these people (referring to asylum seekers), where they come from, what are their needs and how essential welcoming can be extended to them, and the benefits of having these new people in the community.'*

In relation to the subject, the official from the DJE Colm Daly stated: *'Friends of the Centre groups operate in all accommodation centres to help residents integrate into the local community. These groups initiative brings residents, community members and voluntary groups together to explore integration opportunities and develop positive intercultural relationships.'*

However, it was found that initiatives to integrate asylum seekers in the communities starts after the arrival of asylum seekers, as well as discussions between the Government and communities about asylum seekers come after the decision to implement the accommodation centre was taken.⁴⁶ These two factors are correlated as they influence the mentality of the community in relation of asylum seekers, bringing a sense of prejudice that do not allow complete integration between all actors involved and the benefits of it.

⁴⁶ An example is the community of Tullamore, one of the cases studied, where Marian Hotel started a Friends of the Centre group and the Government only invited members of the community to be part of this group after the decision to implement the DP centre there was taken without consultation with the community.

See: <https://www.accommodationcentres.ie/about-tullamore/>

Chapter 5 – Discussion

‘To study conflict we must assume that it is possible to sample not only people, but situations that vary in conflict (magnitude or type) as well, and that the sample of conflicts is reasonable in terms of its range on variety of variables (e.g., intensity, duration, and theoretical cause of the conflict)’ (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2006).

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the finding from the results and relate it to the existing body of knowledge on the subjects explored. In order to achieve this, it is necessary the subdivision of the chapter in two as the theories studied were based in two instances of research.

The Irish Reception System

Every day Ireland is welcoming more and more people in need of international protection, but more than being an open country, it is a necessary strategy to receive and accommodate those people based on the appropriated quality of life that they need in order to make them feel welcomed by everyone. The DP system should not allow asylum seekers to adapt themselves in degrading situations just because these situations are better than the ones they had in their country of origin since they contribute to the Irish society in many ways. Beyond any report criticising the direct provision system and calling for its substitution, it is necessary to understand that Ireland is required under international human rights laws to protect the social, economic and cultural rights of asylum seekers.

It was perceived in this study the extreme necessity for a time limit or timeline for the duration of the process that asylum seekers need to go through to be declared a refugee or obtain subsidiary protection or leave to remain status, as it is one of the most damaging aspect of life in the direct provision system. When crossing information with reports published by non-profit organizations in favour of asylum seekers especially in the last decade, it is notable the development of conditions of direct provision centres. Nonetheless, the National Standards for accommodation requirements need to be in place as per of January 2021 and IPAS need to make sure it is implemented correctly in order to give a better quality of life to residents of DP centres.

The Advisory Group report (2020) noted that under the current system, the accommodation provided for those seeking international protection has not generally been intended for their needs. This research perceived that reception facilities are essential for the quality of life of asylum seekers and their integration into society. In being able to cook their own food, respecting their own culture and traditions, asylum seekers have the opportunity to be established as individuals part of the society they live, as they are executing routine activities like any other person in the community.

Furthermore, Thornton (2018) has argued that “within EU law, the language of ‘reception’ of asylum seekers masks the reality of asylum seeker exclusion from human rights protections.” In his 2014 work, the author also argues that overall, “there has been a tendency to exclude asylum seekers from supports

that are seen as essential to allowing citizens and legal residents to live with a basic degree of dignity.” Endorsing this study outlining the necessity to change the Irish reception system to a more lawful and humanitarian one.

Intergroup Conflict and Integration

This study previously argued that both immigration flows and the economic situation influence attitudes to diversity. The more immigrants coming to a country, the more resistant the native population becomes. According to Putman (2006), cited in Oetzel & Ting-Toomey (2006), conflict has three characteristics: incompatibility of goals, incompatibility of actions and perceived interdependence between the parties. He explains that incompatibility of goals is related to the conflict of interests that causes disagreement between the parties, incompatibility of actions refers to the behaviour that are used to manage the disagreement and interdependence refers to the relational line that cause discordant goals and actions to become issues that need to be managed or resolved.

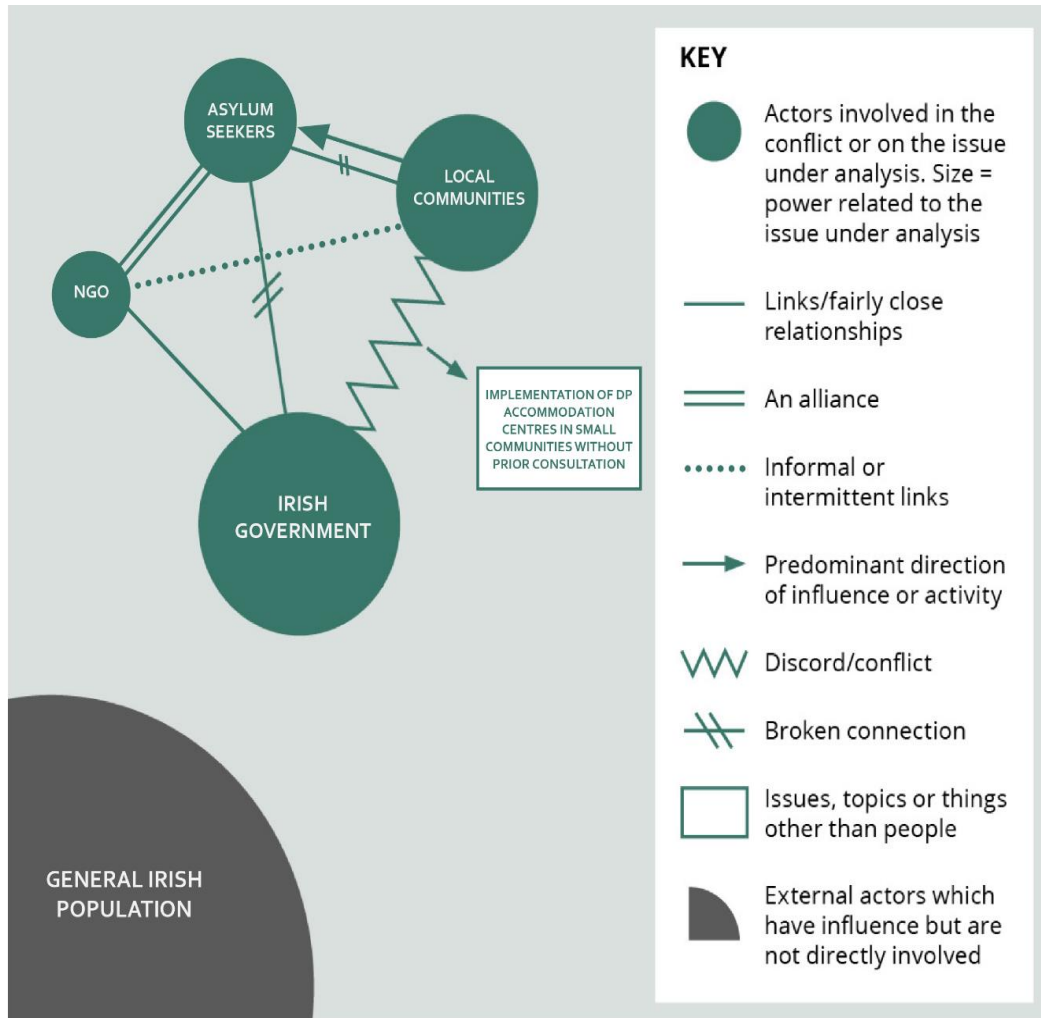
Utilising this perspective, this research shows that there are correlational causes and consequences of events in conflict between communities and Irish Government, as illustrated in figure 5. In most cases, when the number of protection applicants rises, the Government need to open new centres to accommodate these new applicants. Consequently, rumours are spread in relation to where these new centres might be as there is no official information or any type of engagement between authorities and local communities prior to

the award of the contracts. In rare situations, the Government has made some efforts to attend to some of the local population concerns, consulting with local authorities through public meetings few days before the scheduled arrival of the asylum seekers, according to Colm Daly.

However, this research found that community concerns are not effectively managed. Resulting in community tension (leading to protests and attacks) for not having their concerns dealt with, along with the lack of rights to challenge the decision of implementation of accommodation centres, aligned with the fear arising from the lack of communication/information being directed towards asylum seekers, generating hostility and or broken integration.

Important links between accommodation centre residents, the local community and voluntary groups are being promoted by friends of the centre groups. Furthermore, the research recognises that an assessment of local capacities in terms of schools, public transport and medical services should be undertaken by the Government to help in preparing to accommodate future members of their communities. Moreover, for that is necessary that effective engagement between local communities and the Government based mostly in communication occurs.

Figure 5: Conflict mapping



Source: Adapted from Fisher, et al. (2000)

Furthermore, Ellis and Maoz (2012) explains that the most critical ingredients of successful communicative contact are: an environment of equality and diminished status differences, cooperative interdependence and pursuit of common goals, and social norms supporting intergroup contact and affiliative relations.

In relation to the subject, the Advisory Group report (2020, p. 36) affirms that *‘If our recommendation to move away from the congregated setting model is accepted, it should be possible to support local authorities and communities in preparing for and welcoming new arrivals. The introduction of a “new model” is an opportunity to change the narrative around the placement of applicants for protection in the community.’*

After implemented, these measures could result in an end to the conflict between the local communities and the Irish Government in a long effective way. However, initiatives to integrate asylum seekers in the communities would still be necessary.

Conclusion

Much has changed since the implementation of the Direct Provision 20 years ago, but more can be done to ensure that asylum seekers in Ireland receive an adequate and dignified standard of reception, giving them the necessary to engage comprehensively with their asylum applications, and improve integration prospects with local communities, minimizing, that way, social and economic exclusion and vulnerability to exploitation. Furthermore, the system of Direct Provision in Ireland has been a very lucrative activity for companies and an extensive cost for the State. Moreover, the changes made so far in respect of DP system only covers up the problems rather than offer long-term solutions.

Due to the institutional environment created by this system and damaging nature of both the direct provision and dispersal programmes, most asylum seekers develop psychosocial problems, and this has been found to discourage independence (Thornton, 2014). The end result of these arrangements is that asylum seekers face enormous State created barriers to integration, leaving them ‘outside of Irish society, whilst living within Irish communities (Fanning, 2001).

In that sense, the Advisory Group report (2020) was particularly important because it showed, amongst other things, that treating asylum seekers like Irish nationals when it comes to accessing public services such as housing, healthcare and welfare payments is cheaper than the maintenance of DP

system. Furthermore, it demonstrate that it is possible the implementation of a new system to receive and accommodate asylum seekers in a way that profit off vulnerable people will not be allowed anymore and Ireland will be able to stay away from a reliance on private contractors and achieve all international and national protection requirements.

At that point of the research, it is secure point that in order to improve the quality of life of people under the DP accommodation and services in Ireland, while at the same time giving weight and value to the public opinion, a sustainable, humanitarian and lawful approach to protection applicants need to be put in place and it may only be achievable through a proactive examination and reform of the current law and policies, optimizing and giving more visibility to ombudsman model of complaint handling system, community sponsorship, amongst other arrangements.

Moreover, the evidence collected in this research shows that there has been a reaction pattern inherent to the conflict between local communities and Irish Government. The lack of information causes vacuums, and those vacuums are filled with fear and racism. As conflict resolutions are more naturally aligned with issues in communication, the communication between the actors involved in the conflict has vital importance to the resolution of the same.

The pilot Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI) was launched by the Government on 6 March 2019 in collaboration with key civil society

organizations including UNHCR Ireland, the Irish Refugee Council and the Irish Red Cross. Under the programme, private citizens and community-based organisations provide direct support and assistance to people upon arrival in Ireland, assisting them to access services and providing support to settle in their locality.⁴⁷

Therefore, if implemented in all communities in Ireland, the CSI programme might be a solid solution to the conflict between the Government and communities caused essentially by the direct provision system in the sense that such initiative allow community groups to welcome and integrate asylum seekers into the community and for that, it is necessary engagement and partnership between the actors involved in the conflict with the level of consultation/communication required to end the dispute.

⁴⁷ Department of Justice and Equality, ‘Minister Stanton calls on communities to sponsor a refugee family as he launches pilot Community Sponsorship Ireland initiative’, DJE website (Last accessed on 25 October 2020).

Reflections

When I started to think about my dissertation topic, I had already the perception that first, it needed to be about something that I relate to and would really receive more acknowledgment so I would not be doing it just to accomplish my master's degree. Secondly, that It needed to be in line with the area of research that I have since I started my bachelor's degree around 8 years ago, which is immigration.

The main reason that I choose that area of research is because I am immigrant and I understand the difficulties of leave the home country and go to another part of the world, changing life completely while adapting to a new weather, culture, language, rules, etc. It is not an easy experience, and even though that was not my case, I know that it is even more challenging when other option was not given as to flee your country because of persecution.

At the end of last year, the conditions of direct provision centres were part of daily news reporting and for this reason, I had decided that the exploration of accommodation conditions for asylum seekers in Ireland would be an important and relevant idea of research. However, while collecting the primary data through newspaper articles, reports and books on the subject, I realised the range of topics in relation to the whole Irish asylum (due to its flaws) and

the opportunity to explore them in a more concise way relating it to the propositions of the masters. Immigration with intention to seek international protection and conflict came to scene them as this research evolved.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on direct provision centres as well as in this research process. I had to postpone my scheduled interviews with asylum seekers because of the first lockdown along with uncertainty of a safe environment resulting in my workplace being closed. It was, and still is, a difficult time for the whole world and I had to keep trying to find a good balance in respect to my physical, mental and emotional health so I could have enough motivation to proceed with my plans for this dissertation.

Beyond all, I was lucky to have the opportunity to work in the area of the subject I was exploring so the recruitment of participants was not a big challenge since I am involved with asylum seekers and had an idea established as to how to proceed with interviews and data collection. Although, the method of analyse of data was quite difficult and required more research than expected.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Information Sheet

You are being asked to take part in a research study that will provide an overview of the Direct Provision system, including dispersal organization, the Government's obligations to asylum seekers and the challenges within the system. This study will also bring an analysis of the conflict between the Government and local communities in relation to implementation of DP accommodation centres without prior consultation. This work aims to ensure a better and more effective reception system for those coming to the country seeking protection by highlighting the conflict above mentioned as one of the key flows around the Direct Provision system and identifying possible solutions through interview with people involved with the subject of this research.

I am a student of MA in Dispute Resolution. This research is supervised by Matthew Holmes and will be presented to the Faculty of Law Independent College Dublin. This study has been approved by the Independent College Dublin Research Ethics Committee. In this study, you will be asked to ask few questions related to the subjects of the research either face-to-face, by email or online meeting. The study typically takes 20 minutes to be completed by the participant.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation required from you. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn / destroyed.

You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you. You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome. A full de-briefing will be given after the study).

If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The data I collect does not contain any personal information about you. The purpose of this study is to collect data in relation to direct provision system in Ireland and forms to solve the dispute with local communities. In doing so, make clear the extent to which individual participants will or will not be identifiable, as appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

I and/or Matthew Holmes will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact my supervisor at: Matthew.Holmes@independentcolleges.ie

Appendix II

Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE: “Direct Provision System in Ireland: The Conflict between Government and Local Communities and the Impact for Asylum Seekers”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet,
- (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily,
- (3) you are aware of the potential risks (if any), and
- (4) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

Participant’s Name

Participant’s signature

Student Name

Student signature

Date

Appendix III

Interview with International Protection Applicants

Gender:

Age:

Family: ☐ Yes ☐ No

- Nationality:
 - Date of arrival in Ireland:
 - Name of Direct provision Accommodation:
-
- 1- How you were treated when you arrived in the country?
 - 2- Have you ever had to move to another accommodation? If yes, what was the reason?
 - 3- What are the conditions of your actual accommodation?
 - 4- How many people do you share room with?
 - 5- Do you have cooking facilities at the accommodation you are?
 - 6- How is your relationship with the people in the accommodation?
 - 7- Are you satisfied with the asylum housing system?
 - 8- Is there anything that you think could be modified to improve the place you are in? If yes, what it could be and why?
 - 9- How was the community hospitality when you arrived in the accommodation?
 - 10- What do you think about the Government's response to COVID-19 in Direct Provision?
 - 11- Have you ever made any formal complaints about direct provision system? If yes, to whom and why?

Appendix IX

Interview with The Executive Officer/Press & Communications Officer of the Department of Justice and Equality

1. What are the new improvements in the accommodation centres? Are the residents fulfilled with all facilities?
2. How are the national standards for those living in State-provided accommodation being insured?
3. What is the position of the Department of Justice in relation to a resident's rights to privacy and human dignity?
4. What are the department's procedures when there is a COVID-19 outbreak in an accommodation centre?
5. How many asylum seekers still live in emergency accommodation?
6. What process is undertaken in selecting the locations of the new accommodation centres?
7. Why was there no previous consultation with the local communities in relation to the implementation of new accommodation centres?
8. What are the measures, if any, that are being taken in order to engage and consult with local communities?

Appendix X

Interview with community representatives

1. What are the main concerns in relation to direct provision system?
2. How is the communication with the Department of Justice? Is the response immediate?
3. What is your opinion about the Government's response of the COVID-19 outbreak in direct provision centres?
4. Do you think that the procurement and management of contracts process for direct provision accommodation centres is allied with the necessities of the asylum seekers and the communities?
5. What is the importance of events such as protests and attacks against government decisions to set up DP centres?
6. What could be done to ensure that the arrival of groups of asylum seekers do not put pressure on local services?
7. What is your opinion about the Government's lack of proper community consultation?
8. How the Department of Justice would best engage with communities where it is planned to house asylum seekers?
9. In your opinion, what could be done in order to ensure a better interaction between asylum seekers and local communities while have both needs attended?