

# Impact Report 2022

Nasc, the Irish word for 'link', empowers migrants to realise and fulfil their rights.



**Nasc**

Migrant & Refugee Rights

# Chair of the Board of Trustees

**Sheila McGovern**

2022 was a challenging year for Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre. As the country emerged from the emergency footing of the Covid-19 pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine created hitherto unprecedented displacement of people fleeing war to Ireland. The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive across the European Union on the 04th March 2022 created legal obligations for Ireland to provide support to the tens of thousands of Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BoTP) who arrived in Ireland over 2022. Nasc worked closely with local and national partners to shape the Irish response to those seeking safety in Ireland.

2022 also saw a significant deterioration in the reception conditions for international protection applicants. The government commitments to ending direct provision contained in the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision (February 2021), remain largely unfulfilled. For the first time since the inception of direct provision, newly arriving applicants were accommodated in tents and sports stadia and at times, were left homeless.

In addition to the Ukraine response, Nasc's teams continued to work on delivering services and advocating for international protection applicants, refugees and migrants. It was an honour to have our work recognised internationally. Nasc's Connect project won the European Citizen's Prize awarded by the European Parliament. We also launched the integration Report "We are Cork - Stories from a Diverse City" in Cork City Hall in September 2022. Nasc's teams also worked to support our service users applying through the Regularisation Scheme for Undocumented Migrants and the Afghan Admission Programme. These schemes both closed in 2022.

We are also excited that Nasc is developing Complementary Pathways (Labour and Education) in Ireland through the EU Passworld Project. We hope that this programme will allow for the creation of new, sustainable, safe and legal pathways to Ireland for people who have experienced forced displacement. We were also very proud to be named as the Irish NGO co-chair for the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement and we look forward to continuing our work with the Irish government to deliver this in 2023.

We would like to commend the staff and volunteers at Nasc, who worked with compassion and empathy to rapidly expand our services. Their dedication and commitment allow Nasc to create real impact for our clients. We want to thank our funders who placed their trust in Nasc to deliver services and create change. Our work would not be possible without you.

We also want to thank those who used our services in 2022. The courage and resilience in the face of unimaginable hardship and adversity of those we work with, inspires us and challenges us to continue to do better.

**Sheila McGovern, Chairperson**



## **Nasc Board of Trustees 2022**

Brenda Cooper

Dr Fiona Donson

Dr Liam Thornton

Sheila McGovern

John Dennehy

Dr Amanullah De Sondy

Ranita Joyce

Finola McCarthy

Claire G. 



# CEO

## Fiona Hurley

2022 was a year of both change and challenge for Nasc.

In March, we said farewell to Fiona Finn, who stepped down as CEO after over fourteen years of remarkable leadership. Fiona's vision, dedication, and tireless advocacy shaped Nasc into the organisation it is today—one that stands in solidarity with displaced people, challenges injustice, and leads by example in building inclusive communities. On behalf of our team, our board, and the communities we serve, I want to express my deepest gratitude for her extraordinary service.

This was also a year of important staff transitions. We said goodbye to Susan Mackey, Nasc's longest-standing employee, whose leadership in building our social work-led projects leaves a lasting legacy. Susan made an immense contribution—not only to the families and young people she supported through her frontline work—but also to the many social work students she mentored and inspired while on placement with Nasc. We were delighted to welcome Eilis Lee, a former placement student, to carry forward this important work.

We also bid farewell to Julie O'Leary, who briefly joined Nasc as an intern while studying law many years before and returned in 2019 to manage our Advocacy Service. Julie brought empathy, clarity, and dedication to a vital area of our work. In July 2022, we were pleased to appoint Brian Collins as the new Advocacy Service Manager to continue building on Julie's legacy.

As I stepped into the role of CEO later in the year, I did so during a period of historic displacement. The invasion of Ukraine triggered one of the largest forced migrations in Europe since World War II. Over 70,000 Ukrainians arrived in Ireland under the EU Temporary Protection Directive. Nasc mobilised rapidly to meet this new need—offering direct support, outreach, information services, and temporary accommodation pathways through partnerships including the Airbnb Foundation and our Ukraine Information Team. We also developed trauma-informed wellbeing and language programmes tailored to Ukrainian women and families.

Amid this emergency response, we remained committed to long-standing goals: expanding safe, legal migration pathways and shaping national integration systems. In 2022, we were honoured to be appointed as NGO Co-Chair for the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR), hosted in Geneva by UNHCR. We also began preparations to host the Working Group on Resettlement here in Cork—an opportunity to bring Ireland's community-based resettlement model to a global audience.

Through projects like EU-Passworld, we advanced education and labour pathways for refugees and laid the foundation for a new era of Complementary Pathways in Ireland. We built new relationships with Irish universities and developed a pioneering postgraduate scholarship with the University of Galway for two refugee students from Nigeria, supported by a community sponsorship group.

I want to thank every member of our staff, board, and partner network for their tireless commitment during this critical year. And most of all, thank you to those who trusted Nasc to walk beside them—whether navigating a protection process, reuniting with family, or building a new life in Ireland.

# Advocacy Service

In 2022, Nasc's Advocacy Service was a cornerstone of support for migrants and refugees navigating complex immigration systems. Our team provided dedicated, one-on-one support to over 1,000 clients, delivering more than 2,000 individual interventions throughout the year. These supports included legal and procedural guidance across a wide range of issues, with the most common concerns centering around citizenship, visa and family reunification processes, housing, and navigating the international protection system. The global geopolitical landscape significantly impacted our service delivery, particularly following the invasion of Ukraine. Nasc responded quickly to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, providing timely and culturally sensitive support around the Temporary Protection Directive and access to social services.

We also continued our work with Afghan applicants, helping families apply through the Afghan Admission Programme before its closure in March. The launch of the Regularisation Scheme for undocumented migrants further increased demand for our expertise. We submitted 32 applications and offered guidance to over 90 individuals. Additionally, the team identified six potential public interest cases, many related to welfare entitlements, family reunification, and residency rights.

To meet rising demand, we enhanced outreach, including direct in-reach to Direct Provision centres and emergency accommodation sites. We also launched a dedicated Advocacy Service Helpline, expanding access to critical services.

2022 also marked a key staff transition. We bid farewell to Julie O'Leary, who first joined as a legal intern and returned in 2019. In July, Brian Collins took up the role of Advocacy Service Manager, bringing strong frontline experience and a deep commitment to justice.

Throughout 2022, the Advocacy Service remained a vital lifeline—offering clarity, care, and legal empowerment to thousands across Ireland.

---

## Staff Team 2022

Brian Collins  
Linda Pentony  
Natalia McDonald  
Julie O' Leary

# Integration

In September 2022, Nasc proudly launched a landmark integration report entitled "We Are Cork: Stories of a Diverse City"—a vibrant and moving portrait of the migrant and refugee experience in Cork. The report showcases 19 personal stories from people who have made Cork their home, each account offering an authentic window into the joys, challenges, and resilience that define the migrant journey in Ireland.

This publication is part of Nasc's broader commitment to building inclusive, welcoming communities through storytelling, civic engagement, and policy change. With a particular focus on lived experience, "We Are Cork" not only humanises the data but also elevates the voices of those too often marginalised in national conversations about integration.

The report was launched in Cork City Hall with strong attendance from community members, public representatives, and supporters. Contributors to the report shared their stories in person, creating a powerful and emotional connection between audience and storyteller. From tales of language barriers and career challenges to moments of celebration and community, the stories capture a deeply human and hopeful picture of migration.

One participant shared:

*"When I came to Cork, I didn't know anyone. But now, I have a community. I feel like I belong here."*

"We Are Cork" also serves as a practical tool for service providers and policymakers, providing first-hand insight into the integration process and barriers that still need to be addressed.

The project was supported by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), Cork City Council, and the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC). Authored by Cecilia Amabo, the report stands as both a celebration of diversity and a call to action to ensure that every individual, regardless of origin, is supported to thrive.

In a year marked by immense global displacement, "We Are Cork" reminded us that integration is not just a policy goal—it is a community effort rooted in empathy, listening, and shared humanity.

# Connect: Youth

In 2022, Nasc's Connect Project continued to provide critical, tailored support for young migrants and refugees aged 14 to 24—particularly unaccompanied minors, aged-out minors, and care leavers navigating complex systems in Ireland.

Led by a dedicated social worker, the Connect Project offered holistic, person-centred interventions across housing, education, mental health, and wellbeing. The team supported dozens of young people transitioning out of Direct Provision and emergency accommodation, many of whom faced significant instability and barriers to accessing entitlements or educational opportunities. The project also played a vital role in supporting vulnerable young people facing homelessness or mental health challenges, and linking them with specialist services.

The strength of Connect lies not only in its day-to-day service delivery but also in its strategic vision. In 2022, the project was honoured with the EU Citizens Prize, a prestigious recognition awarded by the European Parliament, celebrating the project's contribution to human rights, inclusion, and social cohesion. This award was not only a moment of pride for the team but also a validation of the community-based, rights-led model of youth support that Connect champions. As part of a continued focus on gender and targeted outreach, Connect began planning a new initiative in 2022 to support young men living in the international protection system. Funded through the International Protection Integration Fund, this project aims to address the specific vulnerabilities and barriers faced by young males, with recruitment of participants commencing in early 2023.

Education remained a vital pillar of Connect's work. The team provided academic support, guided young people toward scholarship opportunities, and assisted them with navigating school and college systems. Notably, the team served as an advisor to the Munster Technological University (MTU) Sanctuary Scholarship Programme, ensuring that opportunities for higher education remained open and accessible to displaced young people. Career and life-skills planning were also integrated into the service, encouraging young people to envision long-term goals and work toward sustainable independence.

Throughout the year, Connect continued to build strong relationships with local services and partner organisations to ensure coordinated care and long-term support. In doing so, the project not only served its immediate clients but also strengthened the wider ecosystem of youth integration in Cork and beyond.

Backed by support from Tusla and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Connect Project continues to demonstrate the power of trust-based relationships in transforming young lives.

# Gateway: Women

The Gateway Project is Nasc's flagship integration programme for migrant and refugee women, providing a holistic and empowering suite of supports that meet women where they are, and help build confidence, connection, and community. In 2022, the project expanded in both scope and impact, serving 85 women from 14 different nationalities.

Through a mix of in-person and online programming, Gateway offered English language classes across four levels, supported by the Cork Education and Training Board. The curriculum focused not just on language acquisition but also on fostering communication confidence in daily life, work, and community engagement. Classes were designed with flexibility in mind to accommodate childcare and accessibility needs.

In addition to language support, Gateway delivered creative and wellbeing activities including art therapy, crochet and sewing, mindfulness, and facilitated conversation cafés. The popular Amaris wellbeing groups, delivered in both summer and winter cycles, offered strengths-based mental health support tailored to the lived experience of displacement. The project also provided referrals to housing, mental health, and domestic violence services when needed.

Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Gateway was quick to adapt. Two dedicated summer camps for Ukrainian women were held in Cork, offering a nurturing space for healing, connection, and cultural exchange. Participants took part in English classes, craft activities, and cultural tours.

The Ireland for Ukraine programme launched in October 2022 and provided beginner and pre-beginner English classes on-site in congregated accommodation settings, eliminating many barriers to participation. These were complemented by coffee mornings and social events that fostered belonging and peer support.

The project was supported by a strong team including teachers, therapists, and volunteers, and funded by partners such as the ETB, the Community Foundation of Ireland, and the HSE Mental Health Fund. Gateway continues to provide a vital lifeline for migrant women rebuilding their lives in Ireland.

# Complementary Pathways

In 2022, Nasc began implementing the EU-Passworld Project in Ireland—a pioneering three-year pilot initiative aimed at expanding complementary pathways for refugees through education and labour migration. Funded by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and implemented in partnership with UNHCR, the project positions Ireland at the forefront of innovative and rights-based migration models.

The year focused heavily on design and infrastructure-building. A key milestone was the creation of Ireland's first education-based sponsorship pathway, anchored in a partnership with the University of Galway. Together, Nasc and the university established a postgraduate scholarship programme for a refugee student based in Nigeria. To support the student's journey and integration, a Community Sponsorship Group was formed, made up of students, staff, and local community members. The group underwent specialised training and began preparations to welcome the participant in 2023.

Beyond Galway, Nasc and UNHCR held bilateral meetings with nine other Irish universities, raising awareness of the programme and laying the groundwork for future scholarships. Two Policy Design Sessions for education stakeholders took place—one virtually in May and a second in-person in Dublin in July—ensuring the pathway was informed by both academic and lived expertise.

The labour pathway strand progressed in collaboration with the Displaced Talent for Europe (DT4E) project. A joint stakeholder session was hosted in Dublin in November, bringing together civil society and employers to explore ethical labour migration routes. Additionally, Nasc's project officer represented Ireland at a regional UNHCR workshop in Nairobi, building global partnerships for future scaling.

EU-Passworld reflects Nasc's commitment to safe, sustainable, and rights-based migration options. By integrating education and employment pathways with community sponsorship, the project is laying a foundation for national programmes that centre both protection and opportunity for displaced individuals.

# New Beginnings

2022 marked the second year of the New Beginnings Project, a vital social work-led initiative that supports refugee children arriving through family reunification and children whose families are transitioning out of the Direct Provision system into community life. Building on the foundations of its 2021 pilot, the project continued to respond to urgent needs highlighted in Nasc's 2020 report, *Invisible People: The integration support needs of refugee families reunified in Ireland*. Transition periods—whether joining family through reunification or exiting Direct Provision—can bring significant upheaval for children and young people. Many face heightened risks of poverty, social exclusion, and emotional distress. Families often struggle to meet basic needs during these times, particularly when newly reunited parents must suddenly support children or spouses without sufficient income or access to services. The New Beginnings Project was designed to bridge this gap, working directly with vulnerable families to alleviate hardship and ensure a more stable start.

Throughout 2022, the project delivered hands-on, tailored support including help with moving costs, access to furniture and essential household items, and navigation of services such as housing, healthcare, social welfare, and mental health supports. A total of 61 children from 18 families received support and were connected with mainstream essential services such as social welfare, access to healthcare, housing, therapeutic and general wellbeing services. The project also delivered over 300 hours of intensive English language support to 23 children and young people, using a blended model of face-to-face and online engagement to build their language skills and confidence.

Using a holistic, child-centered approach, the team conducted individual assessments to identify each family's needs and provided wraparound care focused on preventing homelessness, reducing hardship, and supporting long-term integration. Key outcomes included improved language skills, increased school retention, greater emotional wellbeing, and enhanced access to mainstream services.

We extend heartfelt thanks to our English language tutors, translators, and volunteers for their invaluable contributions—and to the children and families who allowed us to be part of their journey.

**Funders:** This project was generously supported by RTÉ and The Toy Show Appeal administered by the Community Foundation for Ireland.

# Community Sponsorship

In 2022, Nasc's Community Sponsorship programme deepened its commitment to refugee welcome and community integration. Despite ongoing pressures on Ireland's international protection and resettlement systems, we supported a growing number of Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs) to prepare for and welcome families into their communities. Our work spanned both Area 2 (South-West) and Area 5 (South-East), ensuring a strong regional footprint.

We were delighted to welcome three new staff members to the Community Sponsorship team in 2022—Stacey Dunne, Majo Rivas, and Elisa Babkina—whose energy and commitment have already brought new strength to our regional and national impact. We also wish to extend our deepest thanks to Maria Bateson, who concluded her work with Nasc in 2022.

Throughout the year, Nasc supported new and existing groups with training, coordination, and casework support. Community groups continued to provide essential services—welcoming families into housing, helping them settle, and guiding them through access to healthcare, education, and social supports.

In addition to family support, 2022 saw an important investment in capacity-building. Our team collaborated with national partners to co-develop training materials and strengthen infrastructure for future programme scaling. Community Sponsorship was also a key component in Ireland's wider humanitarian response, particularly following the crisis in Afghanistan. We worked closely with informal host groups and new models of community-led welcome, sharing best practices and providing adapted resources and training.

Nasc also played an international role—contributing to working groups, best practice exchanges, and showcasing Ireland's model at events such as the Working Group on Resettlement and the ATRC planning sessions.

Funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Community Sponsorship remains a powerful model of local solidarity, rooted in connection, care, and community resilience.

---

## Staff Team 2022

Nael Saoud  
Majo Rivas  
Stacey Dunne  
Elisa Babkina (Ukraine Response)

# Ukraine Response

2022 marked an unprecedented humanitarian response from Nasc as we rapidly scaled up our services to support people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Following the Russian invasion in February, Ireland activated the EU's Temporary Protection Directive, resulting in tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees arriving throughout the year. Nasc responded immediately, leveraging our expertise and partnerships to provide urgent, compassionate, and practical support.

Our Ukraine Response included both direct services and systemic advocacy. We launched an information and support line with Ukrainian-language phone support, helping individuals understand their rights, access services, and navigate life in Ireland. This was complemented by in-reach and outreach work in congregated accommodation settings where many families were initially housed. Our team provided interpretation, legal guidance, and welfare navigation to families facing trauma, uncertainty, and isolation.

We partnered with the Airbnb Foundation to facilitate short-term accommodation for Ukrainian families in transition, particularly those with complex health or vulnerability needs. In parallel, we supported families through orientation, local referrals, and access to education, health, and mental health care.

Our Women's Project and Gateway programmes were central to the Ukraine response. We hosted two summer camps for Ukrainian women, combining English classes, cultural tours, and wellbeing workshops. Additionally, onsite English classes were offered in accommodation centres, with over 35 women attending regularly. We also facilitated art therapy sessions, group trauma support, and wellbeing courses tailored to the needs of women and children experiencing displacement.

As members of both Cork's Community Response Forum and the national Ukraine Civil Society Forum, Nasc helped shape local and national coordination of refugee supports. This response was made possible through the support of the Tomar Trust, Bon Secours Foundation, Community Foundation of Ireland, The Ireland Funds, and the HSE.

# Policy & Research

In 2022, Nasc's policy and research work continued to drive systemic change and amplify the voices of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers at both national and European levels. We published influential reports, contributed to government consultations, and played a leading role in cross-sector coalitions committed to justice, inclusion, and rights-based reform.

A major highlight of the year was the publication of "Ending Direct Provision?"—a comprehensive follow-up report, supported by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC). This research critically examined the progress (and lack thereof) in implementing the Government's White Paper on Ending Direct Provision. The report combined legal analysis, service user voices, and policy evaluation to advocate for urgent reform and accountability.

Nasc also launched "Voices from Cork: Stories of a Diverse City", a community-informed integration report featuring first-hand narratives from migrants and refugees living in Cork. The report brought human experience to the heart of integration discourse and was shared widely among local policymakers and service providers.

We contributed to ongoing national conversations on hate crime, undocumented migrants, and the regularisation of immigration status, and supported the development of legislative and administrative changes. As a member of the Hate Crime Coalition, Nasc remained actively involved in advocacy efforts that ultimately led to the progression of long-awaited hate crime legislation.

In partnership with UCD, we co-published research on Community Sponsorship and contributed to EU-level projects including EU-Passworld. Through the STAD Coalition (Standing Together Against Direct Provision), Nasc collaborated with other organisations to push for alternatives to institutional accommodation and better housing policies for international protection applicants. Our policy submissions and research outputs informed national strategies while staying grounded in frontline realities. This work continues to ensure that the lived experiences of migrants are reflected in the laws, services, and systems that shape their lives.

# Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement

In 2022, Nasc was honoured to be selected as the NGO Co-Chair for the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) 2023, a global platform co-convened by UNHCR that brings together governments, civil society organisations, and refugee representatives to shape the future of resettlement and complementary pathways.

This appointment marked a significant recognition of Nasc's leadership in refugee protection and community-based resettlement. As co-chair, Nasc worked in close collaboration with the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (the State Co-Chair) and UNHCR to begin preparations for the 2023 ATCR, which would be hosted in Geneva. In advance of the main consultation, Nasc began planning the Working Group on Resettlement (WGR)—a key preparatory event scheduled to take place in Cork in early 2023. The WGR provided an opportunity to showcase Ireland's approach to integration and the importance of grassroots involvement in resettlement.

Throughout 2022, Nasc played a strategic role in shaping the agenda for both events. We attended the 2022 ATCR in Geneva and participated in the ATCR Reform Committee, which examined how the consultation process could be more inclusive and responsive to emerging global challenges. We also contributed to the concept note for the 2023 event, helping to define its theme: "Learning in crisis: Building solutions together."

This theme was timely and urgent. With record levels of global displacement, the war in Ukraine, and mounting pressures on international protection systems, it was vital to share innovations and scale up best practices. Nasc used its platform to uplift the experiences of smaller host countries like Ireland and to highlight successful local projects, including our work on Community Sponsorship, the Women's Gateway Project, and EU-Passworld.

Nasc's involvement in the ATCR exemplifies our commitment to global solidarity, policy influence, and ensuring that the voices of refugees and communities are heard at the highest levels of decision-making.



