

Ten Thousand Days

Life lived while waiting





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Ten Thousand Days was produced through the Empowering Women Project, a three-year advocacy programme at Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre, funded by St. Stephen's Green Trust.

This book was co-created with ten women who shared the testimonies of their lives, experiences of the accommodation, food and basic services provided to them as they awaited a decision on their international protection applications. Direct Provision is the name used to describe this system in Ireland. The women took part in lengthy interviews, reviewed drafts of their interviews. Most women did so while still waiting for a decision on their own cases. This book belongs to them, and it carries their chosen pseudonyms rather than their own names.

The book was compiled through these conversations and with the support of colleagues across Nasc, many of whom contributed time and care beyond that of their roles. We are grateful to Kheira Arrouche, a postdoctoral researcher at University College Cork, for her guidance and insight throughout the process, and to the designer and illustrators, led by Amna Mustafa, who gave the book its visual form.

We extend our thanks to the many women who participated in the wider programme over three years and whose conversations shaped the questions that were asked in the interviews. We also acknowledge those who began this process but chose, for reasons of their own, not to appear in these pages.

This book also rests on the testimony of people who named and identified the many flaws associated with this system long before these ten women arrived. Often at great personal cost and frequently without seeing meaningful change. Their voices made space for the stories gathered here.

The accounts in this book describe the participant's own experience of accommodation and of the protection process. They are not presented as findings about any named centre, company or member of staff, and no such finding should be drawn from them. Law and policy described here are correct as of September 2026 and are subject to change. The contents of this book are not intended to be used as legal advice. This book represents the views of the publishing organisation and does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funder. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the authors.

Disclaimer

For the readers:

The accounts included are based on a recorded interview conducted as part of the Empowering Women project. Certain details have been anonymised to protect the participant's identity. It is told in her own words, edited for length, and approved by each participant before publication.

A note on reading this:

Some of what the women describe is hard to read. A list of free, confidential services is printed at the back of the book, on page 55.





Foreword



Nobody sets out to write a book with a number for a title. We added the days up, and then we added them again, because we could not believe it.

Ten women. More than ten thousand days between them in Direct Provision.

The total number of days spent in Direct Provision by these ten women passed ten thousand by September 2026. Eight of the ten women are still there, so this total increases by eight every day and will be higher still by the time you read this.

I conducted these interviews myself. The participants were known to me and the project before we sat down and I was still not ready for how much they had kept going while everything else in their lives remained on hold.

There were tears in most of these conversations. There was laughter too, and there were long pauses while the participant decided whether to say the next thing out loud, and then said it. Not one of them asked me to soften her story or make her sound better than she is.

The challenges of residing within the reception system of Direct Provision have been well documented since its introduction 26 years ago. It has been reviewed, inspected, condemned in reports much longer than this one, the end that was promised has still not come. At Nasc, we have contributed to those efforts and will continue to do so. But this book begins somewhere else: it has been co-created with people who have lived in it as they are best placed to explain what the system does.

Every woman here is a mother. Some are wives. Most are daughters who ring a parent in another country, a parent who can tell from her voice how she is.

Some are raising children in one room, and others have children they have not held in years. They brought with them degrees, trades and years of experience, and they kept finding ways to study, work and move forward where they could.

The stories in this book document what living in Direct Provision does to a woman who has run a household. Where, somebody else decides when she eats and what, which day of the week she can wash her family's clothes, and who sleeps in the room with her children. Whether she can work at all, and how long she will wait to find out. One of the women describes the waiting like this:
Very long to be away from my children, very short to make a life.

None of these rules were written to help her run her own life. They run it for her. After a few years of living like this, a woman who was used to making all her own decisions, becomes disempowered.

The chapters have been divided into three parts but it is important to understand that the lives we have explored here do not fit so easily into sections. The experience of arrival flows into the later chapters regarding health. The experience of motherhood intersects with uncertainty and process. A woman waiting on an appeal is also the person making the dinner, worrying about her child who doesn't eat, ringing her mother, sitting up with a child who will not sleep. Every one of these accounts carries all these facets at once.

They did not want a book that portrayed them as vulnerable victims needing sympathy. They were just as clear that they did not want praise for getting through it. What I heard in those rooms was courage, and it was courage nobody should have needed.

To the ten women who created this book together: you chose to tell your stories out loud while so much was still undecided, and that took more than most readers will understand.

This book is yours. You chose your pseudonyms, you decided what stayed and what came out, and you told us when we had gotten it wrong.

To everyone else, we ask two things. Read the chapters as testimonies of the ten participants. Then read what they are asking for, which is specific and small, and most of which needs somebody to decide that ten thousand days is long enough.

Kiren Khalid,
Co-ordinator Women's Programme,

Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre.



The shared room, the food, and the rules nobody explains.

This section introduces the experiences of the women arriving at Direct Provision accommodation and the conditions there. Beyond the material conditions, the accounts also describe what it is to live for years under rules that are made, changed and enforced without you.

Women arrive at this accommodation exhausted, frightened, and often without the words for what has happened to them. The first account a woman gives to the protection process is rarely the fullest account she can give. It becomes the benchmark against everything she says afterwards is measured. When she later discloses violence, trafficking or abuse, what was missing at the start is treated as inconsistency rather than as the result of fear, injury, language, or simply not yet being safe enough to speak. Late and partial disclosure is well recognised in these circumstances.

Arrival

The accounts in this section highlight the lack of consideration for the realities of trauma. A woman may need time, safety and trust before she can describe what she has experienced. The system takes the earliest and most constrained version of her account as the most authoritative one.

Life in Direct Provision accommodation centres is shaped not only by material conditions but also by administrative systems that remain largely unseen. Centres are run for the State by private contractors, including security companies under commercial arrangements. Yet the people with the greatest power over a woman's everyday life may be the least equipped to respond to trauma, safeguard wellbeing or navigate cultural difference, and the least accountable to public oversight.



Recent legislative changes in the International Protection Act 2026 significantly alter arrival conditions. Everyone who applies for international protection is now screened, fingerprinted, health-checked and given a preliminary vulnerability assessment, in principle, within seven days. What is recorded at this stage shapes whether their application enters the standard, accelerated or border procedure. An account judged inconsistent, false, improbable or misleading is grounds for an accelerated procedure that will take place in just three months. Three months instead of six months for a first decision, and a border procedure concluded, including appeal, in around twelve weeks. Less time to find a solicitor, gather documents, and explain.

A system designed to assess protection must allow people the time and conditions necessary to explain why they need it and obtain legal preparation for their claims. Distress on arrival should not become a reason to give someone less time to be heard.

Food is one of the subjects raised most often by the women, across every kind of premises used: purpose-built centres, hotels, guest houses, converted offices. Self-catering should be a statutory minimum rather than a feature of the better centres, with a stated deadline for those that lack it. Menus should be set with residents' input, and every centre should have a working residents' food committee.

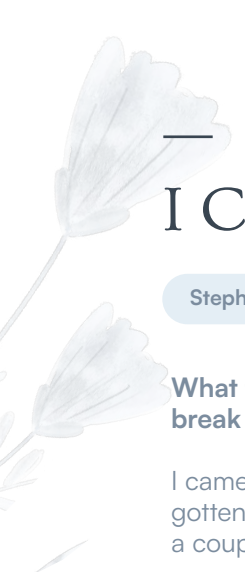
This section also illustrates how space, occupancy and privacy are the conditions the housing shortage bears down on hardest. Families are accommodated in a single room for years. Adults who have never met share rooms of four and more. Children sleep, eat and do homework alongside unrelated adults, and there is nowhere else in the building that can facilitate them.



635 Days

Have I ever counted it in days?
No. I count my wins.





I Count My Wins

Stephanie

What they don't tell you is that it might not break you, but it will leave cracks in you.

I came at the end of November 2024. If I had gotten pregnant when I came, my baby would be a couple of months old now.

The atmosphere in the hostel is depressing enough on its own. I have good health, a sane mind, and I am doing the very best I can in a difficult and complicated situation.

I didn't come here to claim asylum. I came because a woman offered me work.

She was not a friend, just somebody I had seen around. Come, I will get you work, I will help you settle down, at least you make some money and take care of your kids. At the airport I followed her, and she told them I was her sister.

A taxi took us to a house in a town whose name I only learned afterwards, from a bus. Within days I understood what I had walked into, and I understood that her husband was going to become the same kind of problem I had already survived once at home. I waited for the day when she was out. I left nearly everything, took one bag, and walked into the street with no idea where I was going.

By the time I got to the protection office, I was crying, jittery and scared. That night, a few minutes before twelve, a bus put me down in a city I had never heard of, in a room with other women.

Before I came here, I didn't know what a panic attack was. Then I got here, I could burst into tears walking down the street. At night I dreamed I was running and woke up on the floor beside my bed.

There were five of us in that room. Not one of them knew that I cried too. I cry in the shower because nobody can hear you cry in the shower. The only thing they see is that I come out with my eyes red.

I did my makeup before I came to this interview. I told myself, no matter how sad the story gets, I am not going to cry. Because when people see you crying, the first thing they see is that you are broke, you are disadvantaged.

My children are at home with my brother and his wife, and my aged mother is there too. My elder one is at university already. His age is what gives me anxiety, because of what the rules do to a boy who turns eighteen while his mother is still waiting. My elder son says, Mom, are you sure you are, okay? Don't be crying, because I know you, and then I am crying. He says: anything I don't have now, I will have when I grow up.

When you open the door of that building, the gloom hits you in the face. It starts with small things. Not being able to say you don't want rice today and then eating rice with no salt in it. Cooking your own food and coming back hungry and finding the fridge empty where you left it. There are no tables or chairs in the rooms, so if I want to work on my laptop I go down to the dining room, and at half ten they tell me to leave and come back at half twelve.

Before my second round of therapy started, there were a few days when my mind went somewhere it shouldn't have gone, standing at the side of the road. I crossed while feeling like waiting to be hit by a car so it all ends.

When I got back that day, I told myself: if you go, what happens to your children, and what happens to a woman in her eighties whose joy you are? I told the therapist all of it. She asked whether I still felt that way. I don't. But it crossed my head, and still does in my weakest hours, and when people tell me I am strong, I just look at them. I am only strong for the many people who are dependent on me.

Time is a currency, you can use your time to worry, you can use your time to panic, or you can use your time to get better.

I have no work permit. I was refused, and the appeal has been sitting for more than a year. So, I count and utilise my time, QQI Level 5, Manual handling, a security course, Laser cutting. If I am given a work permit today, it is functional for me that same day.

When the new rules come up, the girls inside ask whether we are going to be put out. We are already in the system, is it the ones coming after us, they won't come in the way we came in, and the legal help won't be there for them the way it was there for me. That is what frightens me. The not knowing, the fact that to the government of Ireland I am just a statistic nothing but a number which is not presently positively adding up, but I say this given the opportunity to add, I will be an exponential factor.

Home is a WhatsApp call. My mother carries the phone around the house so I can see everyone. Thank God for WhatsApp, she says, at least I can see your face. I tell her, stay strong until the day you can touch and hold my face again. I miss the touch.

People think we come here entitled. You have a roof, your bills are paid, and you have a medical card. Do you know what thirty-eight euro a week does for you?

I am a productive, resourceful person battered but not useless, broken but not damaged. If I had a work permit, do you think I couldn't earn more than my bills?

I arrived in November with one pair of shoes and the soles were broken. A friend took me to a shop I didn't have any money he bought them for me. Later I was at a meeting and I met a woman whose shoes were taking in water the same way, and when she showed me, I couldn't bring myself to tell her that I had been where she was standing. I went back to my room and picked out shoes and gave them to her.

I was able to do what somebody else did for me. Today she has been deported with her ailing mother.

7 days

From 12 June 2026 every person applying for international protection is screened, fingerprinted, health-assessed and vulnerability-assessed, in principle within a week of arrival.

35% of accommodation centres inspected in the first year of independent inspection had staff who had not been appropriately Garda-vetted.

74% had limited or no system for identifying risk.

International Protection Act 2026, commenced 12 June 2026.

HIQA, overview report on the first year of inspection of international protection accommodation, March 2025 correct September 2026



1,232 Days

The safety is what I am talking about.
It's not the size of the house.



Safety First.

Rosaline

It is like a jungle. You mind yourself, you mind your keys, you mind your space.

If you ask me what I was hoping for when I left Nigeria, I will tell you the truth. I was not hoping. I was running. You are thinking about one thing. Safety. Safety first.

I came here in the spring, three years ago, with my three children.

My story is not a general story; it is my own story, my marriage. I used to say I married a boss instead of a friend. Before that I was doing very well as a single lady, selling clothes, I like selling beautiful clothes, it gives me joy. I had visas for Dubai and Vietnam and I wasted them all. Every one of those doors closed when I married.

Then my husband decided we would relocate to his village. That was my main point. They don't speak English there and I don't understand their language. And at that time the Fulani herdsmen were killing people there in numbers, anybody could look it up, it was known. They also wanted to circumcise my baby girl. I refused.

I was not fighting for myself by then. I was fighting for my kids. Where we were living was not safe either. Before I left, they kidnapped a friend of mine. She went out at seven in the evening for medicine for her little boy, who had temperature. They took her and left the baby there in the shop. After that I hardly went out. Drop the children at school, go to church, home by six.

My children spent their whole childhood inside the flat, and my husband was never around. So, one day I planned myself and I disappeared with my three children. He never knew where I went.

I had nothing in my head about Ireland, no idea how I would be accepted. And I got a very good reception. The manager received me and gave me a room. I never knew I would get a room. Support workers came to check on us. How are you coping here? Don't worry, I said, it's fine, just leave me, I am grateful. It was safety, and my kids being happy at just that.

We were put in with another family, four of us and three of them, and the neighbour would come into my room to prepare her meal and stay to eat it. But I would not complain about the woman herself. She had never been terrible to me, and I knew that if I spoke, people would come after her. Later the manager called me in and said, Rosaline, you never come to report anybody, but they come to report you. I don't have that time, I told her. That is not why I am here.

What I did instead was leave the room. Bath in the morning, drop the children at school, and out walking about, doing the shopping, asking questions. That is how I got the charity job. It was a year and a half before I got a room for myself and my children. The first night I slept peacefully, I understood the difference.

Three years, and that fear is still in me. I sleep at eight o'clock and jump out of the bed. My boy could walk from here to the park on his own and I still cannot let him.

What I learned is that we are not really the same people, even when we come from the same place.

So when my own interview came, I told nobody. It was just me, God and my three kids.

Then the work permit came, around ten months in, and that is what changed it. You are not depressed that much again, because you are allowed to work. I feel for the ones who can't now. You see them going round, trying. They are stuck, just trying to survive.

At the end of my protection interview they asked what I would say to the Minister for Justice. I said that being here is a privilege for me and it will never be abused. My status came in the second winter

It depends on the management. Mine was never bad to me. What was depressing for me was the sharing, and the food.

Where they kept us there is a kitchen, so from the beginning we could cook. When the manager told me they wanted to transfer me, I had to beg her. I said, my first boy is very tiny. I manage him. He eats five times a day and in between as well, and I take my time and prepare his food. If I go over there you will feel it too, because you will see his ribs coming out. He won't eat. I told her that quietly, and I stayed. My children call it the square room. My small boy said to me once, mommy, this room is just like our kitchen.

They bullied my son in school because he was just coming, because he could not fit in yet. I told him to face them, talk to them, get used to them. At night I would cry and say, Father, help me at this point, I don't know what to do, there is only me now.

My children are not demanding. They saw me crying too much in my own country, so they know this place is better for all of us.

I am not a superwoman. I am just trying. One time I said, let's go to France for a holiday, and my eldest told his sister that mommy wants to deceive us and take us back to Nigeria.

I am not that Rosaline any more who came more than three years ago. God has given me a platform: I can work, I can take care of my kids, and I don't want anybody coming to mess me up again. I get tired, but I don't want to get tired of being strong, because I don't have a choice, now I am playing the role of a man.

Give the people who are coming now their work permits. Let them go out, meet people, integrate more. They will pay their tax, so the country is still gaining, instead of keeping them stuck in a room while you feed them and pay their bills. And give people time. A woman can get her status one day and a letter to leave the accommodation two days later, and she cannot even complain, because the ones still waiting will say, if it was me, I would be happy, so why are you complaining.

6 months

is the period the International Protection Act 2026 sets for a first-instance decision in the ordinary procedure. Three months in the accelerated procedure. Twelve weeks in the border procedure, including the appeal.

16 months

was the median wait for a first-instance decision in 2025. *An appeal took a further 12.5 months on average.*

International Protection Act 2026 • International Protection Office and International Protection Appeal Tribunal figures for 2025, via the Irish Refugee Council and the Asylum Information Database September 2026.

629 Days

Welcome to my new beginnings,
and I am winning.





This is About me.

Marjorie

It is not uncertainty that bothers me. What bothers me is that I am not even starting over, I am being prevented from starting over.

Before Ireland I had a vibrant life. Then a man connected to my family got caught up in the drugs, and when he went into hiding the people who said he had scammed them came looking for us instead. It is not one man, it is a network. I was out there as a public figure with a face people knew, so I closed the business. Then they saw me again, by accident or by fate, and I decided it was better to leave than to endanger my family.

I am a believer in energy, and I knew I was coming to Ireland. I booked at ten, I checked in at four that afternoon.

I arrived in shock and my body arrived worse. A heart condition, haemorrhoids bleeding badly from the travelling, still being checked for cancer. Some days I can walk a minute before my back locks, some days it is every five steps. And I was depressed. You are scared and you are safe at the same time.

My first night was spent in temporary accommodation, fortunately my kids contacted a friend who brought me a bag of toiletries, towel, water and sandwiches. I barely slept as I lay in a sleeping bag on the floor.

It was the height of winter and the toilets were outside without toilet paper or hand wash and there was no bathroom. Running to the toilet rather than walking was, quite literally, one way of keeping warm.

The morning began with coffee, tea, tiny sandwiches and a ride to the IPO office.

After standing in line on the roadside, we were motioned to enter the office. I was given a seat and an iPad and asked to tell my story. Sitting was torture. My answers were short and to the point. There was no storytelling, no elaboration. Looking back, I understand that this probably did not help my interview. But at that moment, it was all I had.

Four and a half hours later, after the driver had become lost, we arrived at the accommodation centre.

The lift was broken. I looked at the stairs and felt the strength leave my body. A smiling member of staff took my one small carry-on suitcase upstairs while I followed behind slowly, exhausted and hungry as the overnight sandwich had been my only midday meal and it was after six in the evening.

On the bed there are two bath towels, two hand towels, a bath mat, a bottle of gel and a printed sheet with the laundry times on it. In English and that is your orientation. Toilet tissue you collect downstairs, two rolls, once you know to ask. I was not aware, or told, that persons came to the Centre to sign you up for a medical card or an allowance. I found this out by chance.

Three beds. I was the first person there, so I chose mine. And honestly, I was happy, I could finally tell my immediate family that I was safe.

My first roommate asked me what she was supposed to do with her sanitary pads, and nobody had told her anything. So I ran workshops in the centre. Whatever little structure exists in that place, I was instrumental in half of it.

I asked management for permission to teach basic safety and emergency procedures to residents, and I was told it would be addressed. I am still waiting.

A roommate wanted the window open through the winter, twenty-four hours a day, and I said I have a right to be warm in Ireland. I could show them where it is written, and they had not read the booklet themselves. That is when I became the enemy.

Before you put two people in one room, investigate.

A year and a half, and I have not been given a single room. People who came after me have. I asked for a double bed and was told to produce medical information. I did. Then I was told my case was not a priority.

What I do not do is the clump-up, standing around talking about how bad the food is. If the food disappoints me, I sprinkle salt. If I am tired of bread I go down for milk and put nut butter and sugar in my little blender. Food is not going to control me.

Then there was the morning my daughter rang at 6.47. My phone was on silent, which my family knows, and I never turn it off. When it did not ring she panicked. She rang the centre and asked them to check on me, and the man on shift told her I had gone out. That is blatant laziness. I wrote to management. I never received a response.

Twenty years of skilled self-employment behind me and no route here to use any of it. My qualifications count for nothing, so I am to begin at zero.

I worked one day in an establishment and that was enough for me. You hang your coat in a space beside the toilet so narrow you cannot open your arms. It is inhumane to expect people to work those hours and not care about their wellbeing. I have watched residents coming in at night carrying their shoes, walking on the wet pavement, because their feet could not take any more of it.

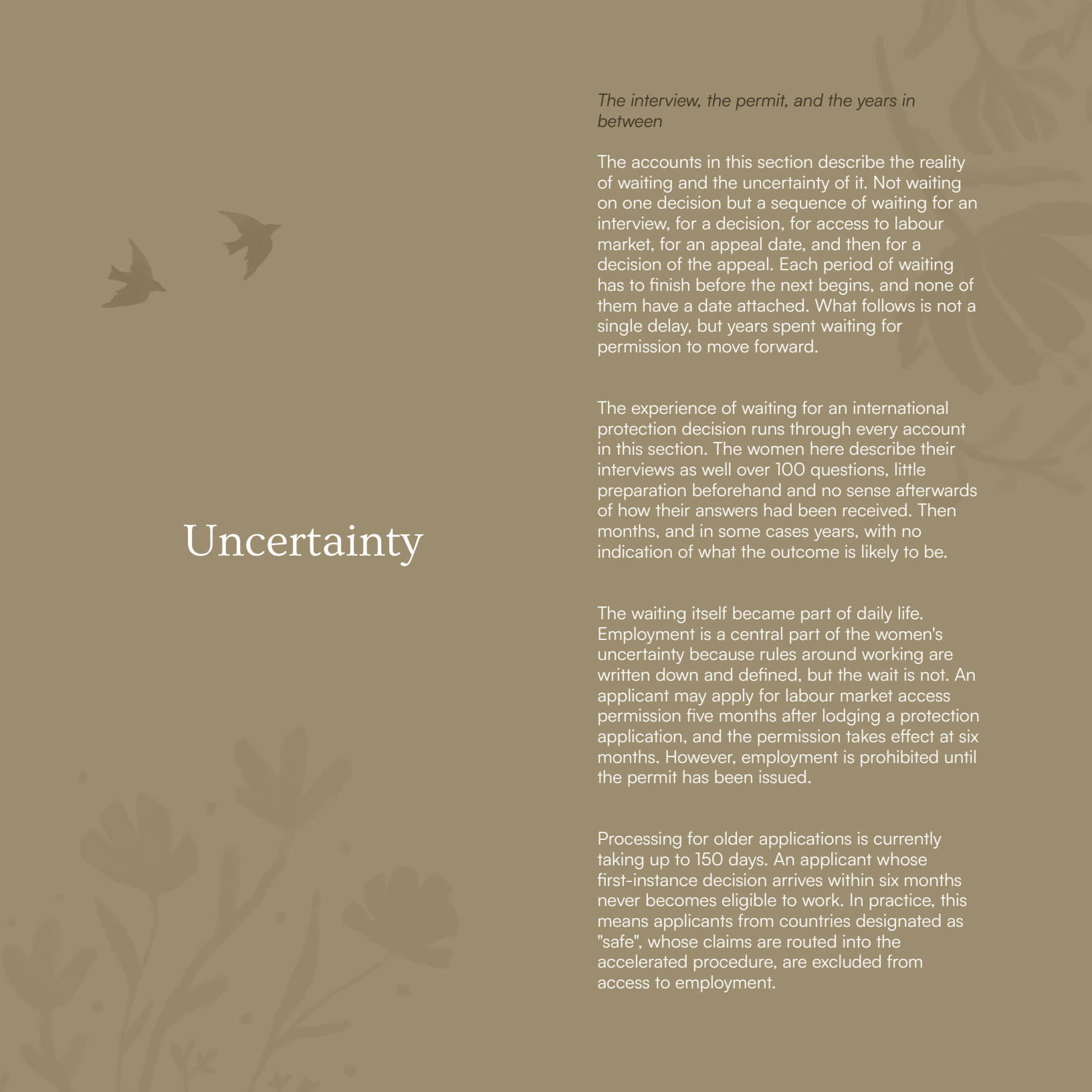
My children are grown, so I am in a blessed position of not being responsible for anybody. Most of the women I know here have children on the other end of a telephone, and the work is not a choice for them.

The racism here is quiet. It is disregard. Everybody arriving becomes a migrant, and you are introduced by nationality and nothing else, she is from Afghanistan, she is from Ghana, to people who will not remember it two minutes later. So I stopped correcting it. I am black, I am a migrant, end of story. Race, or being a woman? Both.

A letter from the immigration office can make a person physically sick, and instead of turning to each other, they shut down. So, they come to my room, one at a time, quietly, to ask what a letter means. I am not even in group chats.

What I want is to be part of an organisation that teaches people self-resilience, the real thing, from within, and etiquette and social graces with it.

This is about me. This is not the immigration office. This is not about Ireland. This is about me knowing what I want & I am going to achieve it.

The background of the page is a solid olive green color. It features faint, stylized illustrations of birds in flight and various flowers, including tulips and daisies, scattered across the surface. The birds are positioned in the upper left and middle sections, while the flowers are more prominent in the lower left and right areas.

Uncertainty

The interview, the permit, and the years in between

The accounts in this section describe the reality of waiting and the uncertainty of it. Not waiting on one decision but a sequence of waiting for an interview, for a decision, for access to labour market, for an appeal date, and then for a decision of the appeal. Each period of waiting has to finish before the next begins, and none of them have a date attached. What follows is not a single delay, but years spent waiting for permission to move forward.

The experience of waiting for an international protection decision runs through every account in this section. The women here describe their interviews as well over 100 questions, little preparation beforehand and no sense afterwards of how their answers had been received. Then months, and in some cases years, with no indication of what the outcome is likely to be.

The waiting itself became part of daily life. Employment is a central part of the women's uncertainty because rules around working are written down and defined, but the wait is not. An applicant may apply for labour market access permission five months after lodging a protection application, and the permission takes effect at six months. However, employment is prohibited until the permit has been issued.

Processing for older applications is currently taking up to 150 days. An applicant whose first-instance decision arrives within six months never becomes eligible to work. In practice, this means applicants from countries designated as "safe", whose claims are routed into the accelerated procedure, are excluded from access to employment.

The right to work is thus determined by an initial procedural decision made before the claim itself has been examined. Neither fairness nor logic supports such an approach.

When a decision does come, it may rest on an account the applicant does not recognise. Decisions can turn on how evidence is presented rather than what it shows, and minor administrative errors can carry consequences far beyond their significance. While there is a route to appeal a decision, there is no clear route to correct the record on which that decision is based. An appeal argues the case; it does not address the accuracy of the file itself.

Applicants should not be disbelieved because documents do not resemble the forms commonly used here, and they should have a meaningful opportunity to review and correct the record of their interview before a decision is taken.

The women in this section also describe legal assistance that extended little beyond the transfer of documents. As legal advice before their asylum claim is not available, they received little advice tailored to their circumstances, no discussion of vulnerabilities in their case, and no preparation for the interview itself. Early legal advice is not an additional service. It is a basic safeguard.

The 2026 Act shortens what time remains. In the accelerated and border procedures, an appeal must be lodged within ten working days of the decision, as opposed to one month in the ordinary procedure. A refusal may also be accompanied by a return decision, meaning a person could be returned to their country of origin, or to a country where they previously resided, while their appeal is still under consideration. Ten working days are not long enough for anyone without advice to understand a decision, gather what is needed and respond to it.

A system designed to determine protection needs must provide not only fair procedure but sufficient time to access and navigate these procedures. A right of appeal exists only if there is a realistic opportunity to use it.

The testimonies show how uncertainty accumulates over years and how delays, decisions, work restrictions, and limited access to legal advice can shape every aspect of a woman's life while she waits.





1,601 Days

I count myself in levels, and
when I came, I was at level two.

From Level Two to Level Eight

Rita

When the voices played, I heard my own voice in public, being listened to.

I came in the first half of 2022, with my partner and my two little girls, and I was heavily pregnant. My son was born here, so we are five now. Before I came, my life was devastated. Something chased me from my country.

I had gone and googled the word refugee, and I thought we would be living in a tent. Then we arrived, and the room was already prepared. It was not a perfect house, but there was a roof over our heads.

We have three rooms; most people have two. Something happened that I had not expected: I became closer to my children than I have ever been. That communion love.

If I want to be by myself I have to go into the bathroom. If I am on the phone, they are there, listening. And I have it easier than most.

A friend of mine shares one room with her fourteen-year-old daughter and her eleven-year-old son; when the girl wants to dress she goes into the bathroom. I do not think that is healthy.

In my early days a woman from home introduced me to the migrant women's centre.

I count myself in levels, and when I came, I was at level two. Back home I was timid. If somebody told me to shut up, I shut up.

Then there was a programme about home, where each of us took one object and spoke about home through it. I chose my mother, because my mother is dead, and she is what home means to me. Three voices were chosen for the recording, and mine was one of them. When the voices played, I heard my own voice in public, being listened to. That was the day I said: yes, Rita, this is the kind of person you are.

There is a community here of people from my own language group, and I am its public relations officer now. Women in the centre come to consult me. Now, when I see the energy somebody is bringing, I place them where they belong.

People make it worse without meaning to: I just got my paper. How many years have you been waiting? And the panic would come up in me. When is mine going to come?

In the end I cut my hair, because I was not balanced.

I have to thank the minister for the work permit, and I will say why. If I did not have work I would have been sitting there thinking too much, and I would have wanted to kill myself.

Then the refusal came, and that was the day that broke me. I called a friend from the programme and she said: don't worry, just cry over it. A quiet woman in the centre, who did not talk much, was the only other person I told. She said it is good to cry, but do not tell anybody in the accommodation centre.

So I cried, I told nobody, and I changed my lawyer, to a Nigerian lawyer, which helped. For that whole period, I walked around acting as though I had already received my papers, so that if it went badly I would not be destroyed.

When everybody had gone to bed I would stand at my window, look at my kids, and think: God, what is going to happen? The depression got heavy enough that the manager arranged a psychologist for me. And my friend from the women's centre said: just go to school, don't just wait. On the noticeboard in the centre, I saw a scholarship for people in the protection system.

The migrant women's centre started it and the women's empowerment programme took me to eight. The levels are literal too: level five in healthcare, then a diploma, and this year I graduate with a level eight higher diploma. To God be the glory, I did.

When your kids want to play outside, you go out with them every time. When they visit somebody's house they run up and down the staircase, because we have no staircase; they ask why we have no kitchen, no dining table, no trampoline. My daughter is meant to do the dishes and she does not, because there is a camera there and the manager could call it child abuse, so the jobs I give them are inside the room. My eldest is nine, and this is the only life she has known.

While I was waiting, I tried to hide the crying from them. Mommy, are you crying? Is it because of the paper? Before bed my daughter would pray, God, please give us our paper, and her little sister would say amen.

It came last year, when my husband told me the lawyer had called: we had our papers, we were refugees. I was rolling on the floor. I cooked jollof rice and fried rice, and my second daughter was so proud she announced it to her teacher. That stage has closed and the next one is in front of me. Now we fill in the housing forms and I tell them, stage by stage. Mommy, don't sleep. Let's bid.

But the house is harder than the paper. A Chinese woman told me what the Irish woman had said about the house I wanted to rent: that she does not want Black people in it. I have not had the letter to leave yet. I do not want to be moved to another county. I have built a life here.

People look at the centres from outside and think everything is free. Free food, free clothes, a free medical card. We do not have that; when you start working, your medical card is taken from you. If I had to tell Irish people one thing about direct provision, it is this: we are not living the way an Irish person lives. We live like a prisoner. It is a prison.

I discovered that I can do everything now. I have a BSc from home; I know it is not going to be recognised here, so I want to do social work, or community youth work.

The government has given me a lot. Now it is my time to give back. I watch the women in the Dáil, and they are very good, and I have never seen a Black woman there. I told myself I will be the first. I have not said that to anybody. I am telling you now.

€38.80

a week is the Daily Expenses Allowance for an adult, and €29.80 for a child. Both rates were set on 25 March 2019 and have not changed since.

€113.80 a week is paid to an adult the State cannot accommodate.

The difference is €75: the State's own weekly valuation of a bed and board.

Department of Social Protection, Daily Expenses Allowance rates • rates set 25 March 2019 • correct September 2026



1,326 Days

When you have problems,
you don't know where to cry.



One Foot in Front of the Other

Nomsa

I just live my life. Day to day.

She arrived from Southern Africa in 2023. She had been married since her twenties to a police officer. There were fights, arguments, threats, and because of her tribe, reporting him was never available to her, since the ruling party is different.

If you have powers, it's not easy to report someone. You can report him, but if they know him, it's just a waste of time.

He would send people to check where she was working, whether she was at work, and what she was doing with her life, so she hid money where he would not find it. Her mother sold a few things to help her go, and a neighbour who had been watching what went on helped her get out.

There is a word she uses that does not translate easily here. Lobola, which she called the bride price, the exchanging of gifts and the paying of cattle. When she wanted to end the marriage her husband would demand it back, and the family carries that pressure. In the back of her mind was her sister, who did not survive her marriage, so she wondered whether it ran in the family, and she was afraid the same thing would happen to her.

She left with no plan and no destination.
Let me just go. I don't know where I will end my life.

Her daughter, now in her late teens, stayed behind with her grandmother. Since then, they have had to move, because he went and threatened them again. They record voice notes and send photographs, and sometimes days pass before she knows how they are.

For the first five or six months she had no access to labour market. She volunteered with a community organisation locally, and still volunteers with them now; when she is free, they call and she goes. But at that time the days had nothing else in them, and she is clear about what that did to her. With nothing to do and no way to earn, she began to question whether there was any point in being alive. What pulled her out of it was having somewhere to be.

When the permit came, she started a QQI Level 5 in care assistance, her first time in any college. She had finished school back home and then nothing, because she married young and that was the end of her studies. She completed the course, and she now works shifts, including nights, caring for older people, and wants to proceed into social care.

All of this, they keep my mind away from thinking a lot. Because if I am sitting alone, it is hard. So, I prefer to do working, keep myself busy. I just keep on doing things. That helps my mind.

The work is hard and she does not pretend otherwise. There are residents who cannot walk, and residents who call her names.

She has lost weight over the three years and puts it down to thinking too much and to the stress.

Where she is staying, they had small fridges which were taken out of their rooms, and the shared one is very small for more than fifteen occupants. She notices what it does to the people who still have no permit.

Three years and three months in the system. The maths was done partway through the conversation, and it came to twelve hundred days. Twelve hundred days, and she still does not know where she stands.

Her first application was refused, and this is where she is most stuck, because her account is that the decision does not reflect what she said. Whatever she wrote, it's not true, whatever she wrote on my application. I don't know how to appeal it, because what information you got is not right.

A solicitor helped with the form, but the questions in the interview turned out to be different from the ones she had prepared for, and the first application went in without much of her in it. What she is left with is a refusal she cannot recognise and no route she can see to correct the record.

It just keeps on moving, moving. I don't know where I'm going. Just like, move. Honestly speaking.

If they sent her back, she does not know how he would treat her or what he would accuse her of. If a decision came earlier or even within six months, even a hard one, she could have planned.

Not everyone here has been kind to her. She has been asked where she lives in a tone she recognises and asked why she is working if she does not pay rent. So, she keeps everything to herself and does not give details.

The counselling came up. An hour at a time, online, for almost nine months. She wanted to see somebody in person and was told that was not possible. She has been told to reapply and has not managed to. She is feeling drained, she says. She does not know what is going on. It is both the physical and the mental, and she feels negative.

What she would say to the minister is about where people live: improve people's living conditions, the food and the management, and look again at the sharing.

They are accommodating people, which is a good thing, but in another way, it affects them more. She wanted the health system on record too. Booking a GP means waiting. You are sick on a Monday, she said, and you are booked the next coming week. They listen, she says, and they try to be nice. But they do not know what is going on.

What keeps her going is not abstract. It is her daughter.

I have got someone that I brought on Earth. I must take care of her. But if I have no child, I will die. She motivates me. I may have died long back.

She sends money to her mother, and something for her daughter's schooling.

She went through what the women's group had opened almost like an inventory, activities that take your mind away from the problem.

Home is home. Here I don't have family, honestly, so it's hard.

She has not seen her family in more than three years. If she had plans, she said, they would meet up somewhere safe at least.

You can have friends, but they are not like your family. When you have problems, you don't know where to cry.

Her own future hopes are not big either. If everything were in order her daughter could come and see where she has been living all this time. She would see what her future holds. Just be happy.

Twelve hundred days.

This one foot in front of the other. That's me now.



672 Days

I tell them everything is going to be okay
even when inside I am melting.



Very Long & Very Short

Beatrice

Home now is where I can do what I want. I can express myself. Where I am safe is home.

Six hundred days. And this is the strange part of it: *it feels very long and it feels very short at the same time. Very long to be away from my children. Very short to make a life.*

I came to Ireland in 2024, from Zambia. I was in an environment where I could not keep both myself and my children safe, so I needed to move them away from it, and in the end I was the one who moved. The most painful part was having to leave my children in a precarious position. I have four children. My eldest is independent, so I am not worried about him. It is the other three I worry about.

My degree is in development studies, and I worked with a non-governmental organisation in health and education. Our main focus was HIV and AIDS. I enjoyed that work so much. I miss it.

When you are faced with an issue of safety you are only thinking, let me get out, let me get out, let me get out. Then you finally get out, and a period of uncertainty begins. Will the application be accepted or not. Whether you will have to go back, and if you have to go back, what you will do then.

We relied on our friends for information, and most of the time the information was wrong. We were even afraid to walk into the office and ask for forms ourselves. If I could speak to the woman who arrived here, that is what I would tell her: don't be afraid to ask.

And if you are afraid to ask in a group, you can always ask when you are alone. People don't see what it does to your independence. You have your own room, but you don't have a life. Laundry is one day a week for some of us, and if I am leaving school at four and I have to be at work at five and I come back at midnight, my day is over. I have to wait for the next week. And you always have to mind the other person.

In the waiting period, we had legal aid, and lawyers were assigned to us. The lawyers took the documentation we gave them and forwarded it. There was no legal advice specific to your situation. So you go for the IPO interview psychologically unprepared and legally unprepared. And then, in the middle of it, they tell you: we need supporting evidence for this, and we are giving you ten days to find it. Ten days. Even if you could get it, DHL Express takes five days from my country and costs a lot of money.

The interview itself is harrowing. Something like a hundred and twenty questions, and every person's case is so subjective that nobody can really prepare you for yours. When I came out I had no idea whether what I had said was even making sense, because I had been trying so hard not to be emotional. Then you wait three, four, five months, and in that time other people are getting theirs, permission to stay, refugee status, subsidiary protection, rejections, appeals rejected.

Agony. Pure agony. You finish one phase and there are two more. It is the limbo that makes me angry.

There will be days when I break down and lock myself up in the room. The following day I talk myself out of it. Look positive. Talk to my kids. Make them laugh.

I would rather mention the problem with a suggestion attached to it.

I am expected to be strong for my friends and my family. I tell them everything is going to be okay even when inside I am melting.

Coming to Ireland, not being with my family, gave me the time to discover myself. I don't need to wait for somebody else to think for me. I didn't know there was a me. I was defined by everybody else but never by me.

In the six hundred days I have changed so much. I started school, I started work, I am opening my mind to new possibilities. Not everything is okay, but I look at it differently now. I have my decision, and it is a positive one, and I am looking for accommodation.

I speak to my children every week, and it is heartbreaking. My son is on the autism spectrum. I am the only person he really fully expresses himself with. When we talk, he does not want me to see him cry, so he will be there on the phone trying to blink away the tears. But I am his mother. I can tell. He will hand the phone over to somebody else, and I will tell that person to run after him, because he is crying. Because he does not understand why I cannot come and see him. Why he cannot come and see me. Why we have to wait.

And then the laws change. I can see the practical sense of them. If you want to bring a child, you have to prove you have the income for that child, that this child is not going to be on social welfare support. Where I come from we would have had less money, but we made sure our children were well clothed and well fed. I would work for my children. I don't need to put them on the taxpayer, but the threshold they have set is very high.

My own country is not an option. So, if I cannot be in Ireland with my children, I would have to rethink my stay here and think of a country where I can be with them. It is my children who sacrificed. It is one thing to tell your children,

I am trying everything to get you here. It is another thing to go back and tell them, I can't get you here, and I can't come and see you.

And if I had one thing to ask for, it is this. Allow us to reunite with our families in the shortest time possible. If they said, we will not give these children social welfare payments, and I know I do not speak for myself alone here; parents would still say yes.

Allow us to bring our children. I will do something. I will not burden you.

2 Years

Is how long a person granted protection must now wait, from the date of the Minister's letter, before applying to be joined by their family. Income and housing are assessed.

The rule took effect on 11 June 2026.

28 months

Is what it took, on the 2025 figures, to reach that letter: a median 16 months to a first decision and a further 12.5 months on appeal.

International Protection Act 2026 and Department of Justice family reunification policy, effective 11 June 2026 IPO and IPAT figures for 2025 • September 2026



Family

One room, the children in it, those left behind

The room a family is given in an accommodation centre is not just a bedroom. It is the kitchen, the study, the sickroom, the playground and the space where the intricacies of marriage are navigated. There is nowhere else in the building to put any of it. What that takes away is not only comfort but also the ordinary authority of a parent: a woman who ran a household and set the times for homework, meals and bed is told which day the family's clothes may be washed, and has nowhere to send a child who needs to be somewhere else for an hour. The protection process does not unfold separately from family life. It enters it.

For four of the ten women in this book, the child is not in the room at all. The separation is not an isolated event belonging to a space and time that has passed. The experience is ongoing. Some left children in the care of grandparents, sisters or other relatives before coming to Ireland. Others have raised children in the accommodation system while separated from the wider family networks that once helped carry the work of parenting. The distance is felt in ordinary moments: missed birthdays, school events described over the phone, illnesses managed from another country, children growing older through photographs and video calls. Women speak often about guilt, wonder whether they made the right decision, about hearing changes in a child's voice and realising another year has passed. Motherhood does not stop at a border. The responsibility remains, even when the ability to meet it has been taken away.

Health runs through these accounts for the same reason. Women describe antidepressants, severe sleep deprivation, delayed appointments, long periods on waiting lists for counselling

and difficulty getting suitable care for their children. A child who will not eat what the centre provides is a child a doctor eventually refers on, and a request to move the family somewhere with a kitchen can be refused as not urgent by somebody who has never met that child. When people spend years in uncertainty, in overcrowded rooms, and apart from those they love, those conditions are part of the cause and not merely the setting.

The 2026 Act changes what happens after protection is granted, and it creates two opposing demands. Anyone granted status must wait two years from the ministerial declaration before applying to bring a child who is outside Ireland. The applicant must also show that in the two years before applying that they have not attempted to access housing support or social welfare payments, beyond a six-month allowance and that their income clears a threshold rising with every family member named. Those are the same two years, in which a person granted status is expected to leave the accommodation centre and find somewhere to rent, in a country that is experiencing a housing crisis. To leave the accommodation centre, many people need housing and income supports. Yet reliance on those same supports can later prevent them from meeting the requirements for family reunification. In short, the support needed to establish an independent life becomes a barrier. Children continue to grow older while those conditions are being met.

The other clock does not begin when the waiting ends. Time spent as an applicant has never counted towards the residence required for citizenship; it begins only once protection is granted. Since 8 December 2025, that requirement has become five years rather than three.

For a woman who waited three years for a decision, citizenship may now be at least five years further away. The years spent waiting are not counted.

Recognition should mean more than permission to remain. It should allow women to live with their children, restore their health and build a secure life in the country they received their refugee status. Many describe receiving status as a moment that was meant to bring certainty and instead brought about yet another period of instability: leaving accommodation, finding housing and establishing an independent life, urgently and with little support. Security turns out to be something that always begins at the next stage.

Time spent waiting for protection is still time spent building a life. Women from these centres work in Ireland's care sector, looking after older people and supporting people with disabilities. The years they spend waiting did not take place at the fringe of society: they were a part of it. But participation should not be confused with wellbeing. The psychological toll is substantial, and shows up throughout the book in form of sleeplessness, anxiety, grief and exhaustion. These experiences are sometimes referred to as resilience. Which makes it sound like something a person chose. There was no choice. They could do little but continue, while the decisions shaping their lives were made elsewhere.



1,176 Days

It was like I was in the darkness.



Black.

Grace

It was like I was in the darkness.

She googled Ireland before she came, because she needed to know where she was going. She did not look up the accommodation; all she was looking for, she says, was safety. England was too close, the people she was running from had family there. Ireland looked big enough that a person might not easily be found. She arrived in 2023, alone, and was sent to a centre far from where she lives now.

The first month, it was like I was in isolation. I didn't know anybody. I was there by myself. From my country, I was the only person.

She went out anyway, before she was working. Golf mornings, groups, anything. She was trying, she says, *"To find my head, because it was hard. Just sitting in the room. It was like I was in the darkness."*

Her daughter arrived, and they were moved to another city so they could be housed together. Then she looked at the room.

It was one room. Only the bed and two wardrobes. But there was no privacy. She could not be on the phone because I am there. So, whenever she wants to be on the phone she would go to the toilet. Of course, the toilet was still inside, and there was still no privacy.

Her daughter went to the library for hours. She stayed in the room.

Before Ireland she had her parents, her neighbours, her church. "I was somebody there," she says. "I feel like now I am not somebody."

Asked what colour she would give those years, she said black, without hesitating: because it is dreary, and it brings you down.

For the first six months you cannot work. You are given €38 a week, and you wait for a permit.

Hers took seven months. The women's group she found changed her life, and the first thing she tells anyone newly arrived is not to sit down.

Even if you try to argue, you will be thinking: I cannot raise my voice. My neighbour is right here, that one is on this side. So, it keeps like you are holding your anger inside. Even if I am angry, I can't. I will be like, okay, I didn't like that. But inside I am hating. I just feel like I should cry. I should just blow out. But I can't.

The kitchen is shared and the women cook in it. Her husband cooked at home; here he will not go into a kitchen full of women, and she will not have him. So, the cooking falls to her and her daughter. The workload is not shared, she says. Her case was refused and her lawyer appealed; they are waiting on a date. The refusal turned on things she could not have changed: an email entered wrongly at the other end, a police report written by hand, because that is how it is done at home.

They don't believe your story. And how do I convince you to say this is a true story? These are my evidence, over thirty evidence. What else do you want me to say? It's like being in a court. I am in a court all the time.

Her daughter started a psychology degree and lasted a year. Then her mother noticed she had developed depression. She was referred to a therapist, and then to others.

She said they don't know what I am going through. And they are asking me: what do you want me to do for you? I am there telling them my story. So she said, you know what? I am going to stop. I am not going to see anyone else. Her mother puts it down to two things, in that order: leaving home, then direct provision. Here her daughter is forced to see people she does not know, forced to smile at them, "even if you are hating inside. That is very difficult for a teenager to do."

There is nothing you can teach your child here. Because you are yourself so uncertain about everything. It's like we are all living in a hostel. One time she told me she wanted to go into the city around ten o'clock at night. I said this is late. She said, 'Ma, Ireland is safe.' I said, no, nowhere in the world is safe. She still left. I was at work, waiting for her to come back. In my country, a child doesn't do that. But I let her do it because I feel like there is nothing else here. There is nothing else.

She works two jobs now, cleaning and care work on nights. She sleeps at work, she says, because she does not sleep at home. She would not say she was rich, she says, but she was doing good, and she would not have left what she had and come here and risk everything. The jobs she does here she could not do in her own country. Here she will do them.

She has watched what the waiting does. People arrive bright and outgoing; give them two years, she says, and you would be shocked.

She is on medication for depression. If she does not take a pill she does not sleep, and sometimes she gets tired of taking pills and lets it be. Two hours, three hours, four hours. "It's okay. Keep on moving."

She is the one holding the family together, her husband is not the strong one at the moment, she says, so she is. There are days she goes off by herself and cries, then wipes her tears, puts her glasses back on, and feels better. Sometimes I get tired. I get tired. And I do cry. When I cry, I feel better. I get tired. But my hope is that I am going to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

She loves flowers. One of the residents she cares for, since diagnosed with cancer, gave her a plant that had been in her family for generations. Her first thought was where she would put it; she lives in a room. She felt blessed, she said, and she is keeping it, and praying for the woman. She dreams of her own house, her own car, a garden behind her own back yard.

Asked what she would say to a woman thinking of coming, she said she would not stop her: safety is here. Her first home will always be home, where her mother is; what she came looking for was a second one.

Her message to Irish people:

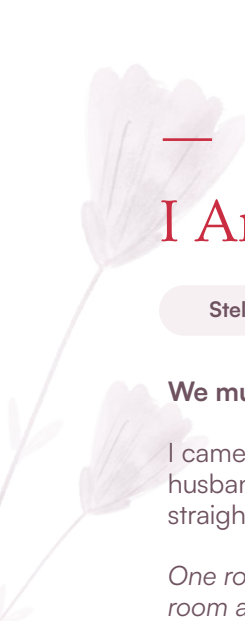
They should treat us as people. We are human beings just like them. We have families. We didn't come here to take away anything from them. We came here because of our situation. We are taking care of their grandparents, their parents. We are not abusing them. We are loving them. We are asking them not to love us, but just to understand us. That's all.

A watercolor illustration of a landscape. In the foreground, there is a dark, textured ground with small white vertical lines. A small red house with a triangular roof is visible in the middle ground. To the left of the house are some grey, rounded shapes. In the background, there are tall, thin, light-colored trees or pillars. A sun with concentric circles is in the top right corner. Two dark birds are flying in the sky, one on the left and one on the right. The overall color palette is muted, with a lot of grey and light pinkish-white, and a few dark red accents.

950 Days

One room. And when I say one room,
I mean just a room and toilet. Finish.





I Am a Survivor.

Stella

We must always have that voice, as a woman.

I came to Ireland in the spring of 2023 with my husband and my four children. IPAS sent us straight to a centre, and they gave us a room.

One room. And when I say one room, I mean just a room and toilet. Finish.

We had lost some luggage along the way, so I was basically just putting a top and a pants. I didn't have a jacket, and I was shivering, and I know somebody saw me. The next day the lady came and said, please, I have noticed that you don't have any jacket, you can't go like this, so I will give you this jacket. It was just a gift.

There was no food provided for us initially, and there were no vouchers given to help us get by. We stayed in that room for two and a half years. More than a thousand days. Because one thing about direct provision is this. You will learn patience. If you know you didn't have that word in you, you are going to learn it by force if you are in the direct provision.

One cramped room, four children, myself and my husband. Coming out from a direct provision, I would say I am a survivor.

For all of it I stayed apart from my husband. I had a little small bunk bed, and I was staying in this direction, and my husband was staying in the opposite direction, for over that number of years, which wasn't nice. And both my teenagers were in the same room with us. No privacy.

So you are not really having intimacy with your husband. As a wife, you stop. And did it create a distance? Of course it will create distance. If I say it doesn't, I lie.

There was no place for the kids to study, and no proper time for them to study, because the room was just a little cramped room. So they stay on the bed, and the bed was the bunk bed. And you hear my neck, my head.

There was nowhere else to send them either. If they go out, staff will tell you they don't want to see them on the hallway, so they have to go back inside the room. So it is the room. Constant noise, for over that number of years.

Why can't we move out of here? We cannot cook. Mummy, can you not tell people, so they should give us a place for us to cook? And we said, don't worry. One day, one day our voice will be heard.

You as a mother will see that your child is not eating what they are providing. You keep telling them, please, these children are not eating, we keep throwing everything away, the food is not even eatable, but yet nobody is doing anything about it. In that accommodation centre, the key word was always to keep smiling at all times, regardless of whether you were happy or sad.

You will be using the word, can I give you cereal? I am tired of this. Cereal every time. But what can I do? That is all we have now, please.

Even the cat in your house cannot eat that particular food. And that is the food they are giving to a human being.

Sometimes, with the little wage I had, I will just take them out. There is this place we buy food, African restaurant, and we would just go there and sit and let them eat. At the end of the day, it makes you just go bankrupt. But you must give them something they would eat happily.

The older one, he goes to play, without eating, and when you see him coming back, you expect, you know, as a mom, that you would have something for him to eat. And he's back and there's nothing he wants. Sometimes he would take a glass of milk or something, to just have something in him. And he's on the bed. He sleeps. The next day he again goes to school like that. No food.

That is when the bleeding comes in as a mother. Because you wouldn't cry for the children to see, but inside of you, you are bleeding. But I would be thinking, if I had my place, my children would have eaten.

Though we can tolerate. We can be patient. But that doesn't mean that we don't have the voice. We must always have that voice, as a woman. When I came in, everyone was like, care job, care job, care job. So I just said okay, let me go for my QQI. I have a BSc in microbiology. I still want to work in a health sector. That is still my dream. Then travel out to different countries. Have fun. I am even thinking of how to further my education, maybe something that has to do with my field. But at the moment I don't even know how to even go about it.

As soon as I leave that place and enter my bus and go to work, I'm a different person entirely. And as you are talking to the people you're taking care of, you're feeling very light. But most times when I come back, as soon as I get back to the direct provision, my mind will still go back to, oh God, this is not where I want to be.

Then the delays came, and the negative decision came. That one alone destabilised me again. I lost lots of weight. I had to take some time off from work. And I'll keep reading the paper over and over and over again.

I just felt the government knew we were all there. If they had wanted to do something about us, they would have moved us, knowing that there's a family in a little cramped room for over that number of years.

All that time we stayed, nobody came. If we could ask the policymakers, the people who are making decisions, to live for a week or two in a room, how would that feel?

We moved out at the end of 2025. Now the kids are happy, because right now they can always eat whatever thing they want to eat. Especially our home food, our cultural food, which they did not have that opportunity in the direct provision. Some people would have said, how can you stay here with these four children in a little cramped room? Do something crazy. Shout. Do this. Let the government come. No. That wasn't what I wanted. I stay put.

I see the accommodation centre as a ladder for you to climb to the next stage in life. No matter how it was, back then I will say, I am going home. I am going back to my house. Whether I was in a little cramped room or not.

Pain. I don't want to go back to pain.

I don't even know if the voice has been heard up till now, because that keeps coming.



1,227 Days

Home is nowhere.
We are stuck in the middle..



Room as a Home.

Nadine

I want him to see me...

Before coming to Ireland, I was living a normal life. I had just had my second child, so I was at home with him on maternity leave. We had a house, we had a car.

My husband witnessed an incident while he was working. There was a gang attack. He told the police what had happened that night. After that, the people involved came after him because he had been a witness. They attacked him several times. They chased his car while he was alone, and he ended up having a serious accident. He was alone that day. Usually, he took our daughter with him.

It was that day that we decided we had to leave. He became withdrawn and lost much of his confidence around people. Even at home, we lived with a constant feeling of fear and uncertainty. The children could sense it too.

We already had a visa for the United Kingdom because every year we applied for a visa to travel somewhere. Instead of going on holiday, we flew there and then came straight to Ireland. People ask why we did not stay in the UK. There are many people from our country there, and people who knew my husband's work knew that he had that visa. Nobody back home would think of Ireland. Even now, his family does not know we are here. They believe we are in France or England.

We came because my husband wanted to be able to walk down a street without turning around to see who was behind him. That is what we came here for.

Three years in one room, the four of us. The room is on the second floor, and the kitchen is downstairs, and I go up and down those stairs several times a day. I feel it in my knees. Our youngest son has nowhere to play, so he runs around the room and jumps on the beds. The children are not allowed to play on the stairs or in the lobby.

Before, we had a routine time for homework, time to go out, time to eat, to sleep! I cannot properly guide or support them when we are all living in one room.

My daughter is eleven, and she understands everything. She has heard us talking about the asylum process and our fear of deportation. She told me that she does not want to go back home. She has her friends here, her school, gymnastics and her life.

She has also seen the stress at home. My children are not eating well, especially my daughter. She finds it difficult to eat the food provided at the centre and misses the food she was used to at home, but I do not have the facilities to cook for her. The doctor said she is underweight and referred her to a paediatrician.

I asked to be moved. They would not accept my daughter's GP request. They said it was not urgent.

The health service itself has been good to us. When I ring for an appointment, they give me one, and they take the children seriously.

We cannot talk the way we did before, and when we do, we often argue because my mind is full of worries. He does not always show what he is carrying.

I am like a warrior now. I am not feeling my femininity.

When I think about privacy, I imagine a room of my own. Sitting on my bed and reading a book in the dark, a cup of tea beside me, my children in their own rooms.

We are not allowed to cook. When the food comes and my children will not eat it, I wash off what I can and prepare it again in a way they are more comfortable eating. Anything else I buy myself.

The rules also keep changing. This year when the manager came for the fridge, my son argued with him. We need the fridge, he said. How am I going to eat? And then: I want a house. He is six. We came in 2023. The first decision came in 2024, and it was negative. We appealed, and the appeal has been ongoing since then. We are now waiting for the second interview. I have to prepare myself for it, even though I already feel exhausted. I cannot move out either. If I rent a place and the decision is negative, we could lose our work permit, and without it we would not be able to afford the rent. We could end up homeless.

I do not sleep well. Sometimes I eat too much, sometimes I do not eat at all. My mind is working and my body is reacting to it.

We appreciate what this country has done by opening its doors to people from many different places. But they see us only as files, and they treat us as files. Show us some humanity. We have been suffering since we came.

Home is nowhere. We left our home and our family, and we don't know when we will see them again. We are stuck in the middle.

When we are out with the children, we say, "Let's go home," but home means one room. My little son says he wants to go to his couch. He sleeps between me and my husband, hugs us, kisses us.

Sometimes I think about having a house, and I wonder how I would even start. I have forgotten how to cook.

After three years, I have discovered something about myself: I am stronger than I thought. I can stand in front of people and speak for myself. Before, I could not say no, not to my father, my brother, or my mother.

I believe my strength comes from my Creator. To the public, and to those who are against migration, I am talking about myself and my family. We are not here for benefits or money. Despite our circumstances, we spend our own money on food, transport, and many other things. We are not a danger. We simply want to live in peace, in a safe place where our children can feel safe.

33,215

People were living in international protection accommodation in January 2026.

9,759 of them children. 159 of the 312 centres accommodating them were emergency centres, disused offices, conference rooms, sports halls.

231 people were in tents.

Asylum Information Database country report for Ireland, figures at January 2026 • correct September 2026

750 Days

I took a map and I wanted
the furthest place of them all.







Miles & Miles Away.

Zodwa

The people who are supposed to be protecting you are the ones beating you down.

I was working, I had a house, I was teaching. I loved the kids, love, love, love, I still miss them today. My daughter was with me, and I went home to my parents most weekends. Then the unrest started in 2019 and everything began going down. I was a victim of it because I was a teacher. In Eswatini the teachers have an association that the teachers run themselves, and I was on its national committee. And the only way they know how to deal with an issue at home is to set the police on you, even for a peaceful march. They attacked the bus we were travelling on to deliver a petition, and threw tear gas inside it, and the next thing I knew I woke up in hospital.

Then it became personal. They detained me and said they only wanted to ask some questions. Our country is an absolute monarchy. The police report to the king.

I went to South Africa, where I have a sister, and it started happening there too. That is when I knew I had to go miles and miles away.

My daughter could not come with me. I could not go back home to have her passport made. So I left her with my sister, and she is still there.

Honestly, I did not even know there was a country called Ireland. I took a map and I wanted the furthest place of them all, somewhere where they spoke English, and there was this small little land that nobody really knows.

At the protection office they told me to write my story, and the space on the paper was so small. Ten lines. How do you even summarise being attacked? And it catches up with you: it took more than a year for me to be called in, and when I was finally sitting there elaborating it was, you didn't write this, you didn't say this. How would I have written all of that at the time?

Then a tiny room with eight beds in it, and I said, do you mean for tonight? They said it was emergency accommodation, a month or so. Eight of us in that room, one bathroom, one shower, and the bathroom was inside the room, my bed faced the bathroom door.

If you asked me to give it a colour I would say red, and my red comes in different shades. First red because I was very, very grateful, let into the country, given accommodation, not left in the street. Then the red goes darker, into danger, because there was a time the Guards were in our room almost every day, and you could not leave your things or your documents lying anywhere. And then red again as a red flag. So many red flags, so many loopholes, so much mismanagement. All they care about is that you follow the rules.

When I got out, I thought, I am a soldier. It was a war I had to come out of alive.

Time stopped. I did the maths with somebody the other day, because I wanted the number. Almost 750 days. Nearly two years, but two years does not sound like anything, and 750 days does. Letters kept coming, so that when you saw a brown envelope in the post you thought, oh my god, what now.

The hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life is have somebody else raise my child. You are not really seen as a mother if your child is not with you.

You are not counted among the mothers, you are one of the single ones, and that part of you becomes non-existent even though you are still her mother. It is like you are not a mother when you don't have your child by your hand.

She is good, though. My sister is doing an excellent job with her, which is bittersweet, because sometimes I think maybe my sister is a better parent than I would have been. Her first day of school, I was not there for. And now, on the phone, she asks me when I am coming back, and you cannot lie and say tomorrow. I would rather sleep under a bridge alone than expose her to that.

I did not tell my parents any of it. I put on a front, everything is fine. I kept that smile up until my papers came, and then I told them it had not been a bed of roses. Some of the people from the association are still in jail today for nothing.

The family reunification is the one that hits me hard. But when you leave your country the way I did, within two months I went from working and settled to completely alone, and you come here and tell them you had to leave your child behind, and you are asking for help to bring her to safety, and it is not happening. How is that fair? Maybe it is part of the anti-migration mood happening everywhere in the world now. In South Africa they believe in physical violence. Here the weapon is policy.

And then it was like a prison gate opening and somebody telling you that you are free. But I still cannot travel freely, I still have to renew my card, and you never know. It is things that keep reminding you that you are a refugee. It is not protection that says, we have got your back, be yourself. It is: we protect you, and in return you are confined.

As long as I still have my mind, my hands and my legs, nothing can really get me down.

I can say that I have found a home here, because I feel safe, to the point that I sometimes forget I am not in my own country.

Coming here today I passed the post office, where there is always a man selling the local paper, calling it out. I recorded him and sent it to one of the women I used to stay with, because every Thursday morning you would go to the post office for your allowance and that is the sound you would hear. She says she will never forget it. And what would I say to the woman who arrived here in 2023? Just to hang in there, more than anything. And never disappear.

I am still in it, still going. But looking back is not an option. We take it from here, forward.

5 years

Of reckonable residence are required for citizenship, and since 8 December 2025 the clock starts at the date of the Minister's declaration rather than the date of application. Years spent waiting no longer count.

473 families and 700 single adults told in March 2026 to leave by early July

Irish Nationality and Citizenship provisions in effect from 8 December 2025 • ESRI research series 184, "Access to autonomous housing for beneficiaries of international protection", June 2024 • correct September 2026



What we heard

Many of our assumptions were challenged by what the women shared. We had expected uncertainty to be the defining feature of the international protection process for women: not knowing the outcome, not knowing when a decision would come, not knowing what happens next. We drafted questions around that assumption, and in the early stages that was our thought process.

Then one of the women disagreed. She was not distressed by not knowing, she said. She was distressed by being prevented from moving forward, and she was not willing to hand responsibility for her state of mind to the immigration process. We had expected uncertainty to explain the stories. Instead, her account challenged that explanation. The book changed because of that conversation.

We endeavoured to record experiences but very often found ourselves recording explanations instead. Women who had spent years in the system described it the way people describe work they know well. They knew which offices responded, which did not, which delays were normal, and which paperwork served a purpose. They understood how rules operated in practice and where apparently reasonable procedures became obstacles. Much of this was offered as information rather than a complaint.

The women of these pages have differing experiences, thoughts and feelings and we have captured them as such. One woman expected a tent and arrived to find a room ready for her. Another describes food she would not give an animal. One was asked how many days she had counted and said she counts her wins instead. Another rejects the idea that her story is primarily about immigration and insists it is about her own future. These differences matter because the purpose of the book was not to produce a single account but to make room for several.

Gratitude appeared frequently in the interviews. So did anger. These feelings were not mutually exclusive and often existed alongside each other. A woman could be thankful for safety and critical of the conditions in which she found it. She could appreciate the opportunity to rebuild her life and still describe specific harms. Treating those positions as contradictory asks something of people in the protection system that we rarely ask of anybody else.

Across the interviews, a common pattern emerged. The women's circumstances differed, but many described the same underlying problem: being judged against conditions the system had prevented them from meeting. A woman may be prohibited from working while her application is being processed, leaving her with no employment record. She may spend years waiting for a decision, yet since December 2025 those years no longer count towards citizenship. This is not an argument about what these women contribute. It is a question of whether the rules, taken together, can realistically be met.

This book does not claim to describe every experience of the protection system. The women in these pages describe their own experiences. Nasc works alongside them and advocates with them, so there is no pretence of distance or neutrality. We recognise that our own experiences, assumptions and interpretations have shaped the ways these stories were gathered and understood. Rather than attempting to remove that influence, we have tried to remain attentive to it throughout the project.

Ten thousand days turned out to be school runs, work shifts, appeals, medical appointments, WhatsApp calls home, missed birthdays, shared rooms, completed courses, children growing older and decisions still outstanding. The number gave the book its title, but the interviews gave the number its meaning. It was never really the story. It was only the measure of how long the story had been going on.

The women in these pages have already done the difficult part. They spoke about their lives while many of the decisions affecting those lives remained unresolved. What follows is what they asked us to carry forward. Most of it is small, almost none of it requires new legislation, and several changes could be made within a month by somebody with the authority to send an email.



What they are asking for

On arrival & in the first week.

A meal on the day you arrive. Nobody should complete an intake without being fed.

One written orientation, the same in every centre: mealtimes, laundry, supplies, how to register with a GP, how to apply for a medical card, and who to ask when something is wrong. In languages and formats residents can use, including for residents who cannot read in any language.

Two trained resident guides per centre, paid, named at reception, walking each new arrival through the building within forty-eight hours. Two women here proposed this independently and one had already been doing it unpaid. Staff trained on the residents' handbook and held to it, so that no resident has to inform a member of staff of a right the handbook already grants.

Vulnerability assessment that allows for late disclosure. What a woman could not say in her first week should not be treated as inconsistency in her second year.

On the decision & the wait.

Meaningful legal advice before the interview, not simply the forwarding of documents after it.

Evidence deadlines set against the real turnaround of the offices the evidence must come from.

A route to correct a decision that rests on a factual error, open without requiring new grounds. An appeal argues the case. It does not fix the record.

Ten working days extended where an applicant has no legal representation.

Work permits issued when the entitlement begins rather than months afterwards, and qualifications and experience recognised so that people are not restarting at nothing.

Written notice before rules that govern daily life in accommodation change.



On rooms, health & family.

Self-catering as a statutory minimum, with a date by which every centre must meet it, and a working residents' food committee in each.

Occupancy limits that end the practice of housing unrelated adults, and families of five and six, in a single room for years.

Somewhere for children to eat, play and do homework that is not a bed.

Medical, religious and cultural need to count towards room allocation, through a written process that can be explained to the resident it is applied to.

GP access and counselling, waiting times for residents, and continuity of care so that finishing one course of therapy does not mean returning to the start of a list.

The two-year wait for family reunification reconsidered for people who have already spent years waiting for the decision that starts the clock.

Reasonable notice to leave accommodation after a grant of status, and support to find somewhere to go.



Support

Where to Find Support

Many of the accounts described by the women in these pages may be difficult to read. It was harder to live through. If any part of it feels close to your own experience, the services below are free, confidential and can be contacted directly without referral.

Emergency Services

if you are in immediate danger, call 999 or 112.

Mental Health & Emotional Support

Samaritans

Freephone 116 123, 24 hours a day, free from any phone. Email: jo@samaritans.ie

Text About It: Free-text HELLO to 50808, 24 hours a day, for a confidential text conversation with a trained volunteer.

Pieta

Freephone 1800 247 247, 24 hours a day, for anyone experiencing suicidal distress, self-harm, or bereavement through suicide. Counselling is free and no referral is required.

You can also text HELP to 51444 (standard text rates apply).

HSE Mental Health Information Line

Freephone 1800 111 888, 24 hours a day. Information about mental health services and supports available in your area.

Domestic & Sexual Violence

Women's Aid

Freephone 1800 341 900, 24 hours a day, every day. Interpretation is available in more than 200 languages.

Sexual Violence Centre Cork

Freephone 1800 496 496, Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm. Text 087 1533 393. Free support for anyone affected by sexual violence, of any gender. Counselling, and accompaniment to Garda stations, hospitals, clinics and court. No referral is needed. An interpreter can be arranged where a client has limited or no English.

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Freephone 1800 77 8888, 24 hours a day, for anyone affected by sexual violence at any point in their life. Interpretation is available Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 6:30pm.

Ruhamma

Freephone 1800 02 02 02 or free-text REACH to 50100. National support for women affected by prostitution or trafficking for sexual exploitation. You do not need a visa, and you do not need to speak English.

Working Conditions

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland

Phone 01 889 7570 (weekdays). Support for people experiencing forced labour or severe labour exploitation.

Immigration Questions

Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre

Phone 021 427 3594

Immigrant Council of Ireland Information Service

Phone 01 674 0200

Irish Refugee Council

Phone 01 764 5854

Doras

Phone 061 310 328



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