

Exiting the International Protection Accommodation Service system: Experiences of housing precarity among international protection beneficiaries in Ireland

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Abstract

Amid a rise in international protection applications in Ireland, and a resultant strain on the International Protection Accommodation Service, or direct provision system, pressure has mounted on those granted protection (i.e. international protection beneficiaries) to move on. This has resulted in some exiting the accommodation system through insecure and informal housing arrangements and has even resulted in some ultimately becoming homeless. This research explores this phenomenon. Through semi-structured interviews with local government personnel (staff and councillors), non-governmental personnel, and international protection beneficiaries affected, the nature of Ireland’s current administrative system is reflected upon, bearing in mind a context analysis that includes consideration of migration in Ireland broadly, the housing crisis, and Ireland local government system. Recommendations are finally provided stemming from the primary research.

Keywords: Homeless, homelessness, International Protection Accommodation Service, international protection applicant, international protection beneficiary, local government, social housing support.

Introduction

The International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) is responsible for the accommodation of international protection applicants (IPAs) in Ireland who cannot otherwise self-accommodate (S.I. No. 230/2018). Once a final decision is made on a person's application for international protection, their entitlement to accommodation, or 'material reception conditions', ceases. Those for whom a positive decision is issued (i.e. they are granted either refugee status, subsidiary protection, or permission to remain) are provided with a stamp 4 residency permission and a number of new rights and entitlements, including those around housing supports. This research focuses on those granted stamp 4 residency following an application for international protection. The paper will refer to such individuals as international protection beneficiaries or IPBs. Specifically, it focuses on IPBs as they exit the IPAS system, in the context of their new set of housing rights and entitlements.

Although there is no right to housing in Irish law, the state does have an obligation to respond to housing need (Lewis, 2019). Among the forms of social housing assistance available, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a common entitlement for IPBs as they exit the IPAS system. The HAP recipient sources a tenancy in the private market, and the local authority makes monthly rental payments to the landlord. The tenant then contributes a weekly payment to the local authority based on their means (Housing Assistance Payment, n.d.). However, due to a shortage of HAP-approved rentals, many IPBs remain in IPAS accommodation for extended periods while searching for suitable tenancies. In September 2025, it was determined that approximately 5,000 people remained in IPAS accommodation, for which they have no legal entitlement (Dáil Éireann, 2025).

On 24 January 2023, the City West Transit Hub (a processing site for newly arrived male IPAs) closed for new intakes (Halpin, 2023), precipitating a homelessness crisis amongst IPAs (Leahy et. al, 2023). Again, on 4 December 2023, IPAS advised that it was no longer able to accommodate newly arrived IPAs. These pressures have had knock-on effects for IPBs, with the then Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth publicly stating:

Despite intensive and exhaustive efforts on the part of Department officials, for some time this year, the State was in a

position of not being able to offer accommodation immediately to all new arrivals. ... Those with 'status' the greatest length of time are being offered a transfer to alternative emergency accommodation so that those currently still in the International Protection process can be accommodated in our Accommodation Centres where they can receive supports. Those currently being offered this transfer have had their status for at least 18 months.

(Dáil Éireann, 2023A).

This research explores the challenges associated with downward pressure placed on IPBs who cannot source sustainable tenancies in the private market. It seeks to explore the systemic issues underpinning the difficulties experienced by IPBs as well as the acute consequences that arise from these issues. It does this through interviews with people working with IPBs and interviews with IPBs themselves. It also aims to prompt discussion on the possibility of systemic reforms, namely local government reform.

Context to accommodation challenges experienced by international protection beneficiaries

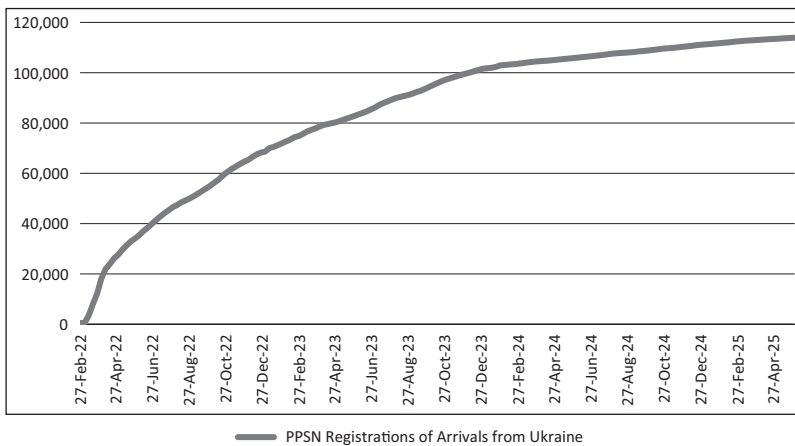
Migration context

The Refugee Act 1996 gave 'statutory effect to the State's obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 New York Protocol' (European Migration Network, n.d.). Seeking to align itself with its European Union (EU) partners, Ireland became a party to the European Council's efforts 'towards establishing a Common European Asylum System [CEAS],' in 1999. However, reaction to increased immigration, including EU enlargement (Houses of the Oireachtas, n.d.) became apparent in short order. The 2004 Citizenship Referendum, which passed with a decisive 79.8 per cent majority, revoked the automatic entitlement to citizenship for individuals born on the island of Ireland (Fanning, 2021). Allegations of Africans exploiting the health system (Fanning, 2021; O'Toole, 2019) and concerns about wage suppression quickly shaped a narrative that framed migration primarily in terms of economic cost (Kelleher & Kelleher, 2004, p. ix; NESc, 2006; Fanning, 2021). Despite the initiation of various sectoral efforts to mainstream integration policy (An Garda Síochána, 2009; Department of Education and Youth, 2010; Health Service Executive,

2008), government commitment to integration diminished following the financial crisis of 2008 (Murphy et al., 2019, pp. 29–31).

A renewed emphasis on integration however came in the form of the *Migrant Integration Strategy* in 2017 which declared that ‘cultural diversity [in Ireland was] no longer a novelty, but a permanent reality’ (Department of Children, Disability and Equality, 2017, p. 6). The transposition of the EU Reception Conditions Directive 2013 (Recast) (European Commission, 2013) into domestic law in 2018 through S.I. No. 230/2018 European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018, placed the IPAS system on a legislative footing. This was then followed by a white paper in 2021 (Government of Ireland, 2021) to end what had become a scandalous system of direct provision which was increasingly viewed as detrimental to the well-being of those for whom it was intended to provide (McMahon, 2015; Day, 2019; Thornton, 2019; Irish Refugee Council, 2019; Department of Children, Disability and Equality, 2021). However, commencing in 2022, a train of events leading to the present has exposed the limitations of Ireland’s preparedness.

Figure 1: Personal public service number registrations of arrivals from Ukraine



Abbreviation: PPSN = personal public service number.
Source: Central Statistics Office, 2025a.

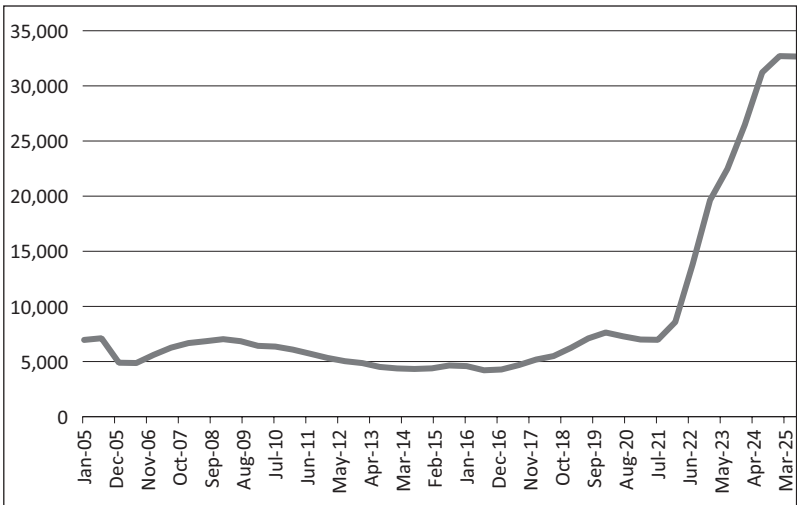
On 4 March 2022, in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Temporary Protection Directive granted millions of Ukrainians, and

permanent residents of Ukraine, access to much of the social assistance systems in place in EU member states. While a pledge system was set up through which the Irish public could make offers of accommodation to beneficiaries of temporary protection (BOTPs), the then Department of Children, Equality, Integration, Disability and Youth (DCEDIY) was mandated to provide accommodation support to the significant numbers of those who could not procure their own. Over the intervening three-and-a-half years over 100,000 people have come to Ireland from Ukraine.

Although not all have remained in Ireland, up to 10 November 2025, the Department of Justice has reported as many as 83,000 BOTPs remain resident in the state (Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, 2025a).

Simultaneously, increased numbers of IPAs arriving in Ireland placed significant strain on the mainstream international protection accommodation system.

Figure 2: International Protection Accommodation Service occupancy 2004 to 2025



Abbreviation: IPAS = International Protection Accommodation Service.

Source: Department of Justice, Home Affairs, and Migration, 2025b.

Protests outside emergency centres for IPAs (Cannon & Murphy, 2024), increased arson attacks on sites earmarked for IPAs

(McMorrow, 2024), an unprecedented riot in Dublin City Centre in November 2023, largely understood as driven by anti-immigrant sentiment (Wilson & Gallagher, 2023), as well as homelessness among newly arrived male IPAs (Irish Refugee Council, 2023a), all indicated a lack of preparedness, and mounting social tensions.

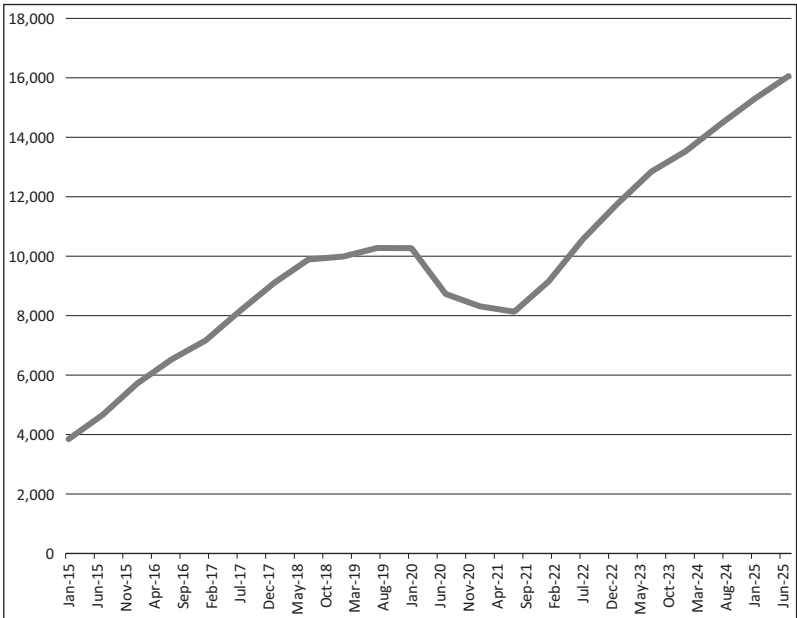
Although the state has made some significant strides in its self-formation as a net inward migration country over the last 25 years, its unpreparedness has ultimately been exposed in the context of geopolitical instability and the mass displacement of people globally in recent years. The housing crisis is an important context within which to understand the challenges of IPBs as they transition from IPAS accommodation and make efforts to integrate into communities, given the protection of the state; there are limited pathways. As will be discussed through a consideration of the findings, the local government system is a site where these challenges are often realised.

Housing and homelessness context

The challenge of accommodating increasing numbers of those seeking the protection of the state has occurred within the wider context of an existing housing crisis in Ireland. With the collapse of the housing construction industry in 2008 came the plummeting of house-building in Ireland. The industry, once supplying over 90,000 units per year, in 2006, would supply less than 10,000 in 2012 and 2013 (Kitchin, Hearne & O'Callaghan, 2017). Rising to 30,330 in 2024 (Central Statistics Office, 2025b), the state nevertheless remains well below government targets (Healy, 2025). And amid significant housing shortages, homeless numbers, among what might be termed the 'indigenous population', have increased significantly in recent years.

Unfortunately, the provision of housing support through, for example, the housing assistance payment, while not without value, does not address systemic housing shortages. In their June 2025 *Locked Out* report, the Simon Communities of Ireland found just '32 properties available within standard or discretionary HAP limits across ... 16 study areas' (Simon Communities of Ireland, 2025). In this context, homelessness continues to rise. Mary Hayes, Director of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, reported in March 2024, that while there was a 2 per cent decrease in new households presenting as homeless and a 6 per cent increase in the numbers exited to a tenancy, 'there was a still a rise in homelessness given the lower rate of exits to tenancy relative to new presentations. Every month,

Figure 3: Number of people who are homeless and relying on emergency homeless accommodation



Source: Focus Ireland, n.d.

more are coming in than are exiting’ (Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024a). Amid systemic housing challenges, and increasing levels of homelessness, housing pathways for IPBs are severely limited. It is within this context that IPBs encounter local government systems.

Local government

Rooted in the state’s formation, the historical tendency toward centralisation in Ireland’s system of administration is often seen as limiting the autonomy and responsiveness of local government in meeting the specific needs of local communities (Considine & Reidy, 2012; O’Halpin, 1991; Breathnach et. al., 2021). Notwithstanding some positive steps from the 1990s, for example the setting up of regional authorities (Breathnach et. al., 2021, p. 128) and the granting of general competence to local authorities, ‘reforms targeting local government’ have been criticised as resulting ‘in very little devolved authority or capacity in local government’ (Quinn, 2015, p. 14). Such

criticism has been reiterated most recently by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, an institution of the Council of Europe, citing the Irish system as one of the weakest in Europe (second only to Moldova) (Council of Europe, 2023).

These limitations coincide with difficulties for minority groups, including IPBs, trying to access housing support (Mercy Law Resource Centre, 2021; Keatinge & Rooney, 2021; Lewis, 2019). In recent research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute, it was found that stringent adherence to regulations, including local connection tests, meant that some households were being barred from accessing housing where they actually had connections (Murphy & Stapleton, 2024). A common test, the purpose of which is to spread the responsibility for providing social housing support around the state, it serves a common-sense function. However, and as we shall see, its application is often at odds with the circumstances of IPBs. Notably, its stringent application in the context of emergency housing, or homeless, support can be seen to underpin significant housing adversity for IPBs 'notwithstanding the fact that the legislation relating to emergency accommodation has no comparable statutory local connection or residency requirements or test' (Mercy Law Resource Centre, 2021, p. 12).

As a final measure to contextualise the findings here, recent research commissioned by Maynooth University and the Immigrant Council of Ireland is worth noting. Their report highlighted the issue of cultural awareness in local authorities, or lack thereof, and found that challenges exist for migrants when engaging with local authority services, including '(1) understanding the role and function of local authorities; (2) communicating and interacting with local authorities; and (3) participating in local authority activities in a meaningful way' (Gilmartin, 2023). A notable development since this research was carried out however is the establishment of the local authority integration teams (LAIT). With a LAIT in every local authority their 'purpose is to help coordinate the different kinds of support available for people who are applying for international protection, refugees, and others in similar situations' (Local Government Ireland, 2025). While an investigation of the LAITs is not a primary objective of this research, their emergence within a context of dramatically increased numbers of people seeking the protection of the state coupled with a housing crisis, is notable and it is appropriate therefore that they feature significantly within the research sample.

Methodology

The issues examined in this research are situated within a dynamic and continually evolving policy context. Accordingly, the study was not designed to generate definitive conclusions but rather to identify and critically examine key themes emerging from this shifting environment. A qualitative research strategy was considered the most appropriate methodological approach, to allow for nuanced exploration where deterministic outcomes were neither expected nor intended (Clarke et. al., 2021, p. 35). It is acknowledged that the sample size, both of IPBs and the officials supporting them, is small and further research in this area is needed. However, the conclusions and recommendations are aimed at contributing to further debate on what is an extremely complex policy issue.

A small purposive sample allowed the researcher to target those with lived experience, or experience working in the area (Clarke et. al., 2021, p.378–80), prompting findings that, while limited, gave rise to concentrated analyses of identified themes. Those contacted included IPAS staff, local authority staff and councillors, civil society practitioners, and those with lived experience. Participants were identified through the assistance of colleagues, and existing networks available to the researcher, in their capacity as a practitioner in the sector of international protection in Ireland.

The primary research comprised thirteen semi-structured interviews, conducted in April and May of 2024. Interviewees were broken into two groups. The first group consisted of practitioners, or ‘officials’ (Table 1). The second group consisted of 4 IPBs (Table 2).

Table 1: Group 1 (officials)

<i>Type</i>	<i>No.</i>
Local authority integration team personnel	x4
Local authority Housing Section personnel	x1
Local authority personnel (previously in Housing Section)	x1
Local councillors	x2
Non-governmental organisation (migrants rights) personnel	x1

The officials consisted primarily of local authority personnel with varying levels of direct experience working with IPBs, in addition to a person employed within a migrants rights non-governmental organisation.

Table 2: Group 2 (international protection beneficiaries)

<i>International protection beneficiaries</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Accommodation status</i>	<i>Family status</i>
1.	Afghan	Male	In IPAS accommodation (tented)	Married
2.	Afghan	Male	In IPAS accommodation	Married
3.	Somali	Female	Local authority homeless accommodation	Married
4.	Somali	Female	Local authority homeless accommodation	Single

Abbreviation: IPAS = International Protection Accommodation Service.

The IPBs consisted of four IPBs, all residing within the greater Dublin area. Two males from Afghanistan were interviewed. They each had a wife and children, who remained in Afghanistan, for whom they were applying for family reunification. They each worked in Dublin and were each residing in IPAS emergency centres in Dublin, one of which was tented. Two females, from Somalia, were also interviewed. One had a husband in Somalia, for whom she was applying for family reunification. They each resided in emergency accommodation, one with IPAS, and the other with the local authority. They worked and studied in Dublin. These interviews sought to examine both the challenges associated with the transition of IPBs from the IPAS system, as well as proposals for reforming this process. Interview questions can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

The research reveals a broad awareness among professionals of the acute difficulties and challenges associated with addressing the needs of IPBs, including in relation to housing and accommodation, and the engagement of IPBs with the current system of local government. The research also sheds light on the experiences of IPBs as they navigate such systems, as well as a number of priorities which underpin their decision-making as they experience housing insecurity.

As the research engages directly with vulnerable groups, it was conducted in line with appropriate ethical guidance (Albtran et. al, 2022). Confidentiality with respect to the identity of those involved was paramount. For example, of the four IPBs interviewed, one wished for the interview not to be recorded on audio. Shorthand was thus the chosen method of record.

Mindful of the researcher's position as a professional within a refugee rights organisation, there was a risk that interviewees would

feel compelled to participate. Clear guidance on the role of the researcher was provided from the beginning; and where issues arose, the interviewer was prepared for appropriate signposting. The research project was explained to each participant, as well as their rights to withdraw from the process.

Findings and discussion

Interviews with Group 1 (officials) are broken into two sections: ‘Challenges’ and ‘A new approach’.

Group 1 (officials): Challenges

Housing

Unsurprisingly, given the shortage of available HAP properties considered earlier, housing was cited as the most significant challenge faced by IPBs residing in IPAS centres. Two of the participants, who were now working in local authorities, but who had previously worked in ‘DCEDIY funded programme[s]’ assisting IPBs to move out of IPAS centres and into accommodation in the community (Government of Ireland, 2017), each now felt that the programmes were no longer appropriate. They understood that those working in the programmes, now, had become overwhelmed, due to a combination of increased demands on the programmes, coincident with decreasing levels of available rentals in the private market. They each also indicated that institutional living (living in IPAS centres) eroded life skills such as money management and cited this as one of the difficulties IPBs experience in pursuing housing, illustrating a vicious circle for IPBs struggling to move on.

However, it was nevertheless understood by some participants that many IPBs were moving on, but that this included informal arrangements such as sofa-surfing and subletting. One participant observed that there were added risks for IPBs. Having worked in the area of homelessness they recalled decisions made in the context of increasing numbers of homelessness ‘years ago – there was a lot of saying “hang tight, stay with a friend”’. Without condoning such an approach, they felt that local authorities could, with less risk, push back on Irish families who were often able to better rely on family, or local communities, with local authority emergency accommodation being offered in extreme cases. In contrast, they felt that IPBs were that bit more vulnerable adding that ‘they will probably walk away and

feel, well the local authority told me no, and then they'll go to potentially dangerous arrangements'. This participant had also heard that some actors might be profiting from this situation, through informal rental agreements, which they understood were for short periods, and could include severe overcrowding and extortion.

Notwithstanding challenges around accessing homeless services however, the participant from the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector noted a stark increase in the number of IPBs presenting to homeless services referring to figures published by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive in the first quarter of 2024 – 88 single-person households, and 6 families entered homeless emergency accommodation in Dublin with a presenting reason of 'Leaving direct provision' (Dublin Region Homeless Executive, n.d.).

Housing was deemed the most significant challenge facing IPBs, with several participants demonstrating an awareness of the consequences and risks that arise out of pressure to exit IPBs from the IPAS system, including homelessness, marginalisation and exploitation.

Us and them

The notion of IPBs occupying some marginal status was not however confined to acute housing situations. One participant suggested that given their general housing insecurity, IPBs then also faced additional challenges in terms of attracting employment or investment from communities. While increasing numbers of IPBs are presenting in local homeless services, many are accepting the transfers to alternative locations. They suggested that employers and local development organisations, for example, were being deterred from investing in new communities given the likelihood of them being transferred out of their communities upon being granted status.

This was only further compounded by what one participant characterised as the 'exceedingly settled' nature of some Irish small towns. In one town he had worked in, 'people from one side of the river would under no circumstances live on the other side of the river. They found it an alien culture. We're talking hundreds of metres'. A pre-existing culture of othering in local communities was thus viewed as adding to the challenges involved in introducing migrants to towns in Ireland.

Moreover, and indicative of the piecemeal development of Ireland's approach to migrant integration in Ireland, a general lack of cultural awareness among local authority staff working with IPBs was

noted, attesting research considered above. Poignantly, it was noted by another participant that their local authority's housing team had come to perceive IPBs as competing with an indigenous Irish population for housing.

Thus, separate to acute housing challenges, broader challenges regarding integration at a local level were cited as contributing to a difficult context within which IPBs were expected to navigate local authority services.

Local connection

One notable manifestation of this included difficulties for IPBs accessing local authority housing and homeless support. One participant highlighted the challenge of determining the appropriate local authority for assistance. In one case, an IPB had been registered as eligible for social housing support by one local authority but became homeless in another local authority area, leading to a situation where neither local authority assumed responsibility for providing homeless support. Amid little fixity of tenure for IPBs experiencing housing precarity, this scenario was viewed as especially problematic.

Another participant reported encountering resistance from local authorities in providing emergency accommodation to individuals who had not yet established eligibility for social housing support. IPBs were advised to seek assistance from the local authority corresponding to the area of their last IPAS residence. Notably, the last IPAS centre this individual had occupied was a tented accommodation, one of several temporary facilities the individual had resided in since arriving in Ireland. The local authority's insistence on a supposed local connection to an area where the individual had only resided briefly – and in tented accommodation – was characterised as untenable.

From these examples, arose concern that local government was not adequately acknowledging the predicament of IPBs exiting the IPAS system, an issue explored further, and regarding IPBs more generally.

Lack of planning

One participant, who worked in the homeless section of a local authority, had experience working with an IPB whose family had arrived under family reunification. As a young person who had been declared a refugee, they had an entitlement to reunify their family in Ireland (see section 56 of the International Protection Act 2015). As the family were not IPAs however, rather beneficiaries of family

reunification, they could not enter IPAS accommodation. The family were taxied to the front door of the homeless section, by the young person's social worker, with no prior notice of them arriving. With great effort, emergency accommodation was obtained, however, the participant then found significant challenges in identifying the relevant supports to meet the additional needs of this family, which included severe mental and physical health needs.

This participant emphasised the need for enhanced planning to address the complex needs of IPBs, who face significant challenges in rebuilding their lives. Expanding on this, they included wholesale reform of legislation effecting IPBs. They were familiar with IPBs who had been offered alternative accommodation on the other side of the country: 'Person has established themselves. Working. On our [housing] list. A lot of this is down to legislation. It is old, outdated, and not current. When we do a homeless assessment, we are assessing do you have a suitable alternative accommodation. To me, a move to Donegal is not suitable accommodation'.

They suggested that the Housing Act 1988's definition of homelessness was created in the context of significantly different challenges in terms of the needs of people in Ireland. An outdated legislative framework meant that important decisions regarding circumstances unanticipated by the legislators were now a matter for the interpretation of local authority staff.

On the subject of greater coordination and planning however another participant suggested that 'the level of coordination between the departments of central government ... there's very little. If I was a conspiracy theorist, I'd say they definitely don't want the right hand to know what the left hand is doing, but because I work in the system, I'd say if they had that much intelligence, I'd be shocked. They're just uncoordinated'.

Summary

Evident in the findings is an awareness of both the systemic and the acute challenges facing IPBs. Systemic challenges include a housing crisis, a lack of awareness of the needs of IPBs at the local level, and a lack of an appropriate framework through which to address such challenges. Participants were, however, able to demonstrate a real awareness of the acute difficulties experienced by IPBs, including the risk of homelessness, marginalisation and exploitation. From this arose several proposals to address such challenges.

Group 1 (officials): A new approach

Local level coordination

Reform of local government has been an important agenda of government, spanning decades. Notwithstanding the limitations of reform efforts considered in the literature review, one very recent addition to local government empowerment has come in the form of the local authority integration teams. With the role of providing ‘ongoing integration supports to IPAs, resettled refugees and BOTPs’, many of these teams are now established and active in local authority areas across the country (Murphy & Sheridan, 2023, p. xvi).

Four of the participants involved in this research were members of these teams. They described their role against previous deficiencies in local government. As one LAIT participant noted, ‘there probably was a gap before in relation to integration. I think that’s what the new teams are coming for. And that’s why there was a decision made at national level’. Acknowledging that lots of work is being done, albeit sometimes inefficiently, they described their role as contributing to efforts to bring ‘together all the different agencies and [provide] the support that can make efficiencies greater and reduce duplication and also identify blocks and gaps’.

Echoing this notion of local government working as a coordinator of services, another participant, who worked in a homeless section of a local authority, noted that things worked well when all stakeholders worked cohesively and on an equal footing. They shared workspaces with external agencies: ‘it’s not “them and us” ... we are a team within here, even if I work for the council’.

More local government

On the other hand, local councillors interviewed worried that any such equalisation among stakeholders and the council risked eroding the council’s democratic authority: ‘Oireachtas wouldn’t allow the HSE and Tusla to be equal members to a committee on health and safety, but they expect local government to do that – wrong in practice and wrong in principle’. An over-proliferation of agencies was a worry for other participants too.

On the subject of reform specifically, one councillor noted, positively, the significant response from government to those seeking the protection of the state from Ukraine: ‘With Ukraine they got very good’. The suggestion was that such a response needed to be developed further and along with another councillor, it was this

participant's view that local government should be augmented in this regard.

Notably, councillors worried more regarding the erosion of the leadership status of local government and suggested that a failure to address imbalances of power and decision-making between local and central government agencies would result in poorer outcomes for IPBs (it should be noted that local authority staff evidenced some concern here).

Division

However, local government reform was not proposed blindly. One councillor who was explicitly pro-local government reform worried that an indigenous population would increasingly find itself in competition for limited local-level housing with IPBs. Referencing the report from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities produced in October 2023 (Council of Europe, 2023), he suggested that 'if the state wants to transfer the responsibility to local government, then they have to transfer the power and the money, but they are not doing that'. Notwithstanding his antipathy to the proliferation of agencies, it was clear the housing needs of IPBs could only be addressed, for this councillor, by significant local government reform or by the establishment of a bespoke agency.

In contrast with this, the NGO staff member interviewed exhibited some caution around increasing powers at the local level. They referenced developments around the Housing Miscellaneous Provision Bill 2024 and worried about the input from local authorities. They expressed concern that based on this input, the bill would limit emergency accommodation access to those who meet a habitual residence condition, thereby serving to legislate for the exclusion of some migrant homeless groups from homeless services. They referenced a debate from 23 April 2024, from the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2024a,b). Although not addressing these worries, it was the view of the councillor that 'part of the problem is that advocates have lectured the people with concerns rather than trying to work with people with concerns'.

Thus, in evidence was a tension between a local government system that viewed itself as coordinating local-level services, in partnership with other agencies, and perhaps led by central government, and a local government system that aspired to be an effective administrator of local-level services with local-level democratic accountability.

Group 2 (international protection beneficiaries)

Interview questions for the IPBs were deliberately broader to both reduce the risk of probing unethically into sensitive issues but also to support the collection of more authentic insights, not confined to rigid framing.

Declining the offer of alternative accommodation

Three of the participants said they felt that they had no choice but to decline IPAS's offer of alternative accommodation. Transfers would have meant losing jobs, disrupting education or losing their acquired 'social capital'.

In coming to Ireland, one participant noted, he had already started his life again. 'When you have jobs, when you have community. Leaving your country, finding a new community, and leaving it again – like country to country, or county to county. Every new place you face problems'. Having gone through the process of building a new life in Ireland, he was not prepared to sacrifice what he had built, and was therefore prepared to enter informal housing arrangements and risk homelessness.

Another participant undermined the feasibility of IPAS's offer of alternative accommodation arguing 'it doesn't make sense. I know some people who went. IPAS are moving them again'. This participant had sofa-surfed for as long as they could but were now in local authority emergency accommodation.

Another female participant described the experience of sleeping in a tent on the grounds of a Mosque. IPAS had offered her alternative temporary emergency accommodation. However, it was over 200 km away. Although eligible for the Housing Assistance Payment, she was unable to find housing on the private market. This lady had worked in a nearby city so decided to move closer to that city instead of taking the transfer. At first, she was able to sleep inside the mosque but then had to move outside, onto the grounds of the mosque. She is now in local authority emergency accommodation.

No choice

One of the IPBs had taken an IPAS transfer and was, at the time of interviewing, living in tented accommodation. This individual arrived in Ireland in spring 2023. At that time, IPAS was unable to provide accommodation to all single men and he therefore experienced a three-week period of street homelessness outside the International

Protection Office on Mount Street, Dublin 2. (This period was reported on by the Irish Refugee Council. See, Irish Refugee Council (2023b). Following this, he was transferred to tented accommodation on state land for six months, before he was transferred to a hotel, where he lived in a dormitory. It was at this time that he was granted refugee status and started working. He was then asked to exit the IPAS system. He was unable to find a suitable tenancy. The importance of being able to rely on new friends was not lost on another participant; 'You might end up on the street, especially those who have not made friends'.

Accessing local authority emergency accommodation

One female participant, who had been sofa-surfing and was now residing in local authority emergency accommodation, spoke of significant 'pushback' from the local authority when she first approached them in need of support. She explained that they told her that 'they don't provide for singles, only families'. She sought legal assistance before access to emergency accommodation was granted following the submission of an affidavit attesting to her circumstances.

Perceptions of social housing support

Three of the participants were very clear about the fact that they did not understand their housing entitlements in Ireland. Two of the participants had been of the understanding that once they were granted status, they would be offered statutory, or council, housing. They understood this would have been paid for through a small rental payment and their taxes. However, over the course of their time in Ireland their perceptions were readjusted. One participant spoke of how he had perceived Ireland as a 'European country, in terms of everything, living standards, medical, education'. He explained he had come to realise the reality is very different.

More than housing

What became evident in the course of the interviews was that the participants prioritised their families through work, education and social networks, over and above their immediate need for secure housing. Three of the participants were married and had families, including children, who remained in their respective countries of origin. They had applied for family reunification and were awaiting a decision. One participant commenting on the difficulties of this noted: 'It's really challenging. Kids. Especially when you are away. And in this

connected world ... where they tell you I miss you papa, when are you coming back and then you look in your travel document and it says you cannot come back to your home country. I deal with it by distracting myself. There is no philosophical way’.

This participant now worried about what would happen when his family arrived. He hopes he will be able to afford housing by the time they arrive. Notably, participants viewed ensuring that they are integrated through work, education and network-building as a priority over and above their immediate need for secure housing, which they saw as a longer-term priority.

Although he has found his experience over the last year challenging, the participant, who remains in tented accommodation, expressed a gratitude for the safety and protection afforded to him in Ireland. Even on the street, he felt protected by the presence of An Garda Síochána. This protection, he said, contrasted starkly with the persecution he fled in his country of origin. His primary objective now was to get his family to Ireland and maintaining his employment was a priority in that regard.

Conclusion and recommendations

The pressure to exit IPBs from the IPAS accommodation system is compounded by the increasing levels of homelessness experienced by IPAs awaiting entry to the very same system (Department of Justice, Home Affairs, and Migration, 2025c). This research addresses the challenges associated with downward pressure placed on IPBs who cannot source sustainable tenancies on the private market. Through targeted discussion, the research reveals a broad awareness among professionals of the acute difficulties and challenges associated with addressing the needs of IPBs, including in relation to housing and accommodation, in that context. Moreover, discussion of the shortcomings of the existing system of administration was facilitated, which led to discussion relating to the reform of that system. It also sheds light on the experiences of IPBs as they navigate such systems, and the priorities which underpin the decisions of IPBs experiencing housing insecurity.

Group 1 (officials)

The most significant challenge cited for IPBs exiting the IPAS system was a shortage of available and affordable housing. A systemic issue, this manifested itself acutely in the lives of IPBs exiting the IPAS

system through experiences of homelessness, marginalisation and exploitation. This prompted discussion regarding the needs of IPBs more broadly and concomitantly local government reform as a measure to meet those needs.

It was clear that the officials viewed local government as a significant player in the area of integrating IPBs into local communities. Generally, they worried about the risk of marginalising IPBs through existing cultures, a lack of cultural awareness, outdated systems and frameworks, and poor coordination of resources. Although all the officials indicated a preparedness to respond to the needs of IPBs, councillors, in particular, felt substantial reform of local government was required to empower it to respond. The below are a number of recommendations that flowed from discussions:

1. The LAITs were viewed as aiding greater coordination of services for IPBs in local communities. A priority for the LAITs is capacity-building through, for example, money-management sessions, partnering with the local Money Advice and Budgeting Service. In the event that housing is available, IPBs would be supported through preparation for tenancy sustainment.
2. One concern raised by a member of a LAIT, however, was the over-reliance on a single team to oversee integration efforts across a local authority area. This reliance contradicted the principles of mainstreaming integration policy and failed to address underlying systemic issues.
3. Echoing this worry, another participant with direct experience in resettling programme refugees (those identified as refugees abroad and relocated to Ireland) in four small Irish towns emphasised the importance of investing in staff training and resources across the board, particularly in cultural awareness, as crucial for effective integration and community-planning. They suggested that local authorities had the potential to have an impactful role, but ultimately felt they were not properly resourced.
4. Furthermore, increased interdepartmental planning was identified as necessary to address the complexities of IPB households, such as family reunification. Efforts to overcome silos within local government were required, and evidently ongoing.
5. One local authority staff member suggested that children should be the focus of efforts to meet the needs of IPBs. Meeting the

needs of children, in turn meets the needs of adults (i.e. their parents). Sport was identified as a medium through which communities could be brought together.

6. One participant, working in the housing section of a local authority, suggested house swaps as an effective way of meeting the needs of local residents appropriately, and suggested this could create more space within the market. It was suggested that local authorities needed to be more creative.
7. Other participants cited a failure of the housing assistance payment to keep pace with rental market prices as contributing to poor housing outcomes for IPBs. Increasing rates would better enable IPBs to move on to secure tenancies.
8. New legislation to underpin the determination of homelessness by local authorities was recommended given the new context within which local authorities were now operating, and the shortcomings of the Housing Act 1988 in this regard.
9. Administrative barriers, such as stringently applied local connection tests, make it difficult for IPBs who have lived transiently in IPAS emergency accommodations, to settle. It can also be used to deny people access to emergency supports.

Although councillors interviewed echoed many of the same concerns as local authority staff, they were more critical of the Irish local government system's capacity to respond to the needs of IPBs, in its current form:

1. It was suggested that a major reform of local government was required, including major devolution of power. It was suggested that this would reduce the risk of an indigenous community feeling increasingly alienated as they struggle to compete for the limited resources currently on offer through more appropriate management of local resources. In the alternative, it was suggested a robust agency would be required to manage the housing needs of IPBs independently.

Group 2 (international protection beneficiaries)

While it was evident that housing or accommodation was a major priority for the IPBs, the quality of such housing was counterbalanced with other factors. A major consideration was the longer-term vision they had of their lives, one which included their families:

1. IPBs interviewed exhibited limited awareness of their housing and accommodation rights. One participant noted that an initial orientation at the start of the international protection process would have been beneficial for more effective planning.
2. One participant reported spending the majority of his time in Ireland in tented accommodation. He remained in tented accommodation at the time of interview. The local authority's approach to addressing this individual's social housing need, as evidenced by his eligibility for the Housing Assistance Payment, warrants critical reflection.
3. Participants expressed the feeling that they had little to no agency in determining their housing pathways after leaving the IPAS accommodation system. They emphasised the importance of preserving what they had established since arriving in Ireland, such as employment, education and social capital. This underscores the need for a well-planned accommodation system that prioritizes these factors. The officials further observed that, in the absence of such planning, there is a risk of exploitation by nefarious actors.
4. The long-term aspirations of those interviewed included family reunification in Ireland. The officials emphasised prioritising children in this process. However, a participant with experience supporting households arriving through family reunification highlighted the need for interdepartmental coordination, which they found to be insufficient. Addressing the housing needs of IPBs and their families, therefore, necessitates recognising this critical requirement.

As noted, IPAS staff were contacted with a request for their participation but did not respond. The findings, based on interviews with local authority personnel, NGO staff and IPBs affected by pressures to exit the IPAS system, nevertheless facilitated a wide-ranging discussion. Generally, local government was viewed as having a role, notwithstanding the need for some reform, with variation in terms of what such reform would entail. The LAITs, while not perfect, were considered a positive step forward in terms of better coordination of local supports for IPBs. However, it was evident that existing systems and frameworks in place to support IPBs have their shortcomings. The legislation governing the accommodation and housing needs of IPBs was cited as outdated, and it was proposed that the current regulatory arrangements in place caused harm to both

individuals and their communities. This discussion formed the basis upon which a number of recommendations were formulated.

This research also evidenced the acute difficulties faced by individuals as they navigate the process of exiting the IPAS accommodation system. Amid significant housing shortages the weaknesses of Ireland's housing rights framework was exposed through the experiences of the individuals interviewed and their experiences of precarious housing and homelessness. Given the significance of those experiences, it is hoped that this research will trigger further and broader research on the subject matter with a view to greater, critical exploration of the challenges, and the formulation of much needed solutions.

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Appendix 1: Questions for Group 1 (officials)

1. How does your work relate to ethnic minorities, including, but not limited to, international protection beneficiaries?
2. In your experience, what supports, if any, enable positive integration in communities for ethnic minorities, including, but not limited to, international protection beneficiaries? Is there any system in place that enables this? If so, can you outline your understanding of this system and comment on its effectiveness?
3. In your experience, what are the challenges faced by international protection Beneficiaries in accessing social or emergency housing supports?
4. What is your understanding of the challenges faced by local government and community supports when working with international protection Beneficiaries in need of emergency homeless support?
5. In your view, do local authorities have a role to play in the integration of international protection Beneficiaries? If so, what is this role, and does it require reform? If not, why not?

Appendix 2: Questions for Group 2 (international protection Beneficiaries)

1. How did the asylum process go?
2. What is your housing history in Ireland?
3. How was your experience in International Protection Accommodation Service?
4. Tell me about your experience accessing housing, or housing support.
5. Do you think there is anything that could be done better?

