



# TREND

Training Refugee  
Entrepreneurs

## REFUGEE & IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

### *Irish National Report*

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## 1. Introduction, Research Methodology and Data Limitations

This report briefly sets out the recent context for inward migration in Ireland, specifically forced migration. The main aim is to map the infrastructure and provision of services and supports in Ireland for refugees who wish to start up a business as entrepreneurs or refugees who are now running their own enterprise. It will also identify gaps in current service provision seen by those who have assessed the needs of individuals from refugee backgrounds who aspire to becoming self-employed.

In conducting this research, the limitations of current Government and statutory record keeping have been seen. There are serious gaps in disaggregated data on access to the status of self-employment and enterprise supports by those who have sought refuge in Ireland under the 1951 Refugee Convention. While small projects or schemes can instance individual progression from training or mentoring towards employment or self-employment, the type of detailed data which tracks the ethnicity, nationality and asylum status of individuals seeking enterprise supports in Norway, is not currently being recorded centrally in Ireland. Where some data is held on the ethnicity and nationality of those accessing supports under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme on the IRIS database The research was desk based with internet, email and phone queries used primarily. Telephone interviews with staff of Cultur, a local Intercultural project which supports refugees into employment and self-employment in Co.Meath and of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection supplemented these enquiries. Email queries to and written materials from the Irish unit of the European Migration Network(EMN), Pobal (agency distributing Irish Government and EU social inclusion funding), MASI (Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland), Women4Women at the Southside Partnership and others were also used.

The research brief was provided by the IADT, the Irish partner in TREND.

## 2. Overview of Inward Migration to Ireland

Historically Ireland has been a country of emigration with all of the negative social, economic and psychological impacts that follow from it. From the second half of the 1990s, Ireland began to experience a surprising new pattern of largescale inward migration<sup>1</sup>. Up to 1995 the Irish economy grew at a rate which was much slower than that of the other countries in Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> During the 1990s, unemployment in the rest of the EU was static, but in Ireland it was halved and economic growth outstripped its European neighbours. From that point on, there was a need for rapid economic catch up which created gaps in the labour market. These were initially for specific categories of migrant workers, and the search began outside of the EU, but as the economy developed further, these needs diversified. Another consequence of economic growth was that Irish people who had emigrated in the recession of the 1980s, also began to return to work here.

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<sup>1</sup> Fintan O'Toole, 2009 "Ship of Fools"

<sup>2</sup> Immigrant Council of Ireland Submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, 2018

With the enlargement of the EU planned for 2004, European Economic Area (EEA) nationals began to come to Ireland to fill some gaps in the labour market, both in low wage positions such as mushroom farming and higher skilled occupations. Under EU rules, EEA nationals became eligible to move to Ireland to become self-employed several years before they gained freedom of movement to seek employment. Unlike some of the other traditional EU countries, Ireland facilitated access to self-employment from first arrival.<sup>3</sup> The expansion of the EU in May 2004 to include 10 New Member States (NMS) made it possible for workers in some Central and Eastern European countries to take up work in the EU-15 and because of the pressing need at that time for skilled workers, Ireland was one of the few EU countries to provide full freedom of movement rights of workers from the 10 NMS. In 2007, the year where inward migration hit a peak, 85,000 individuals migrated to Ireland from the NMS, almost half the total net immigration in that year. Immigration from the NMS fell to about 10,000 during the economic crisis which began in 2008. That recession reversed the pattern of inward labour migration and resulted in an increase in emigration. Ireland returned to positive net migration for the first time in the year to April 2015 after experiencing net outward migration for the previous five years.<sup>4</sup>

In 2017 the Central Statistics Office (CSO) presented revised estimates of population and migration in line with the 2016 Census.<sup>5</sup> This data shows that as the recession was easing, Ireland experienced increases in estimated immigration and decreases in emigration in each year between 2012 and 2016. This demonstrates that the increased diversity within the Irish population due to inward migration which began in 1992, is now a permanent feature and is obvious in the most recent Census (2016) figures. They showed that 17% of the Irish population now belongs to a minority or migrant community. Almost 200 different languages are now spoken in Ireland and since a more streamlined naturalisation system was introduced in June 2011, approximately 100,000 people have acquired Irish citizenship. In 2016, the top five nationalities of those who were naturalised were Poland, India, Nigeria, Romania and the Philippines, among whom were some individuals who would originally have been recognised as refugees or been given leave to remain.<sup>6</sup> There were a total of 566,600 people holding a nationality other than Irish who were resident in Ireland in April 2016. This remained below the previous peak recorded in 2008 (575,600) prior to the recession. The single largest group of migrants is from the 12 NMS, 250,300, and this exceeds their number recorded in 2008.

The Irish economy now depends on the skills of those born here, from both indigenous Irish backgrounds and second and third generation migrants and of more recently arrived migrants. However when it comes to the major challenges of adapting social and education

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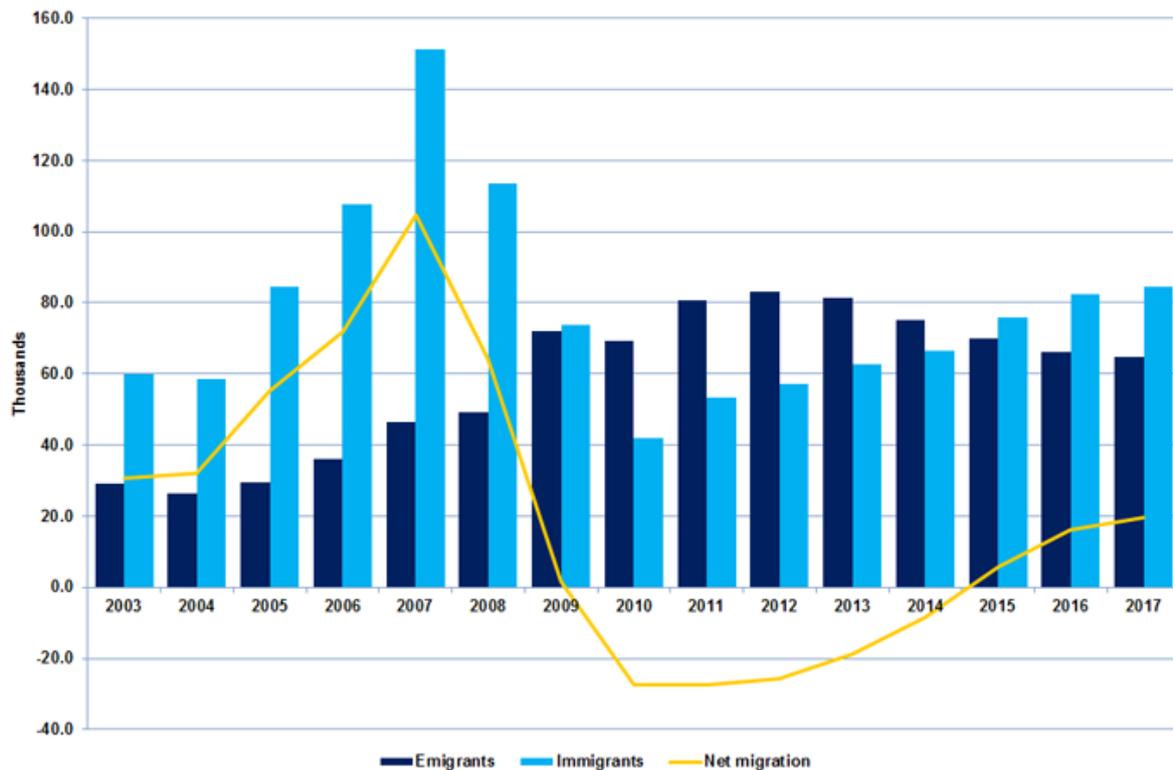
<sup>3</sup>[http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving\\_country/moving\\_abroad/freedom\\_of\\_movement\\_within\\_the\\_eu/freedom\\_of\\_movement\\_in\\_the\\_eu.html#lb586a](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/moving_abroad/freedom_of_movement_within_the_eu/freedom_of_movement_in_the_eu.html#lb586a)

<sup>4</sup> In the "Population and Migration Estimates April 2017" the Central Statistics Office (CSO) present revised estimates in line with the 2016 Census. The revised estimates result in an increase in estimated population as well as increases in estimated immigration and decreases in emigration in each year between 2012 and 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Philip J O'Connell, 2018. "International Migration in Ireland, 2017," Working Papers 201809, Geary Institute, University College Dublin.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Justice and Equality-Immigration and Naturalisation Service-Immigration in Ireland: Annual Review 2016

infrastructure to accommodate equality of outcomes for individuals from diverse backgrounds, there is more work to be done. The Immigrant Council of Ireland believes that the integration of migrants needs to be approached in a holistic way that encompasses the participation of immigrants and members of the minority ethnic communities in all aspects of society such as economic, socio-cultural, political and civic, and engage with all institutions and services.<sup>7</sup> They also promote an emphasis on an integrated approach to tackling instances of racism and discrimination.



Source: [Population and Migration Estimates, CSO](#). 2011 data: Census of Population. 2016 data: Census of Population. 2017 data is preliminary. Includes revisions to the Population and Migration Estimates for years 2012-2016. The reference period for population estimates is mid-April of the years shown.

### 3. Refugee and Migrant Entrepreneurship in Ireland in the EU Context

By 2017, Economic growth had entered a new phase in the 28 EU Member States, with ten million new jobs having been created since 2013. The overall rate of unemployment has been decreasing across the EU.<sup>8</sup> However, inequality has also risen as a consequence of the last recession. Migrants and particularly young migrants show disproportionate levels of disengagement from the labour market and

<sup>7</sup> Immigrant Council of Ireland Submission to: Chairman of EU Affairs Dominic Hannigan Realising integration through access to rights, justice and services, April 2015

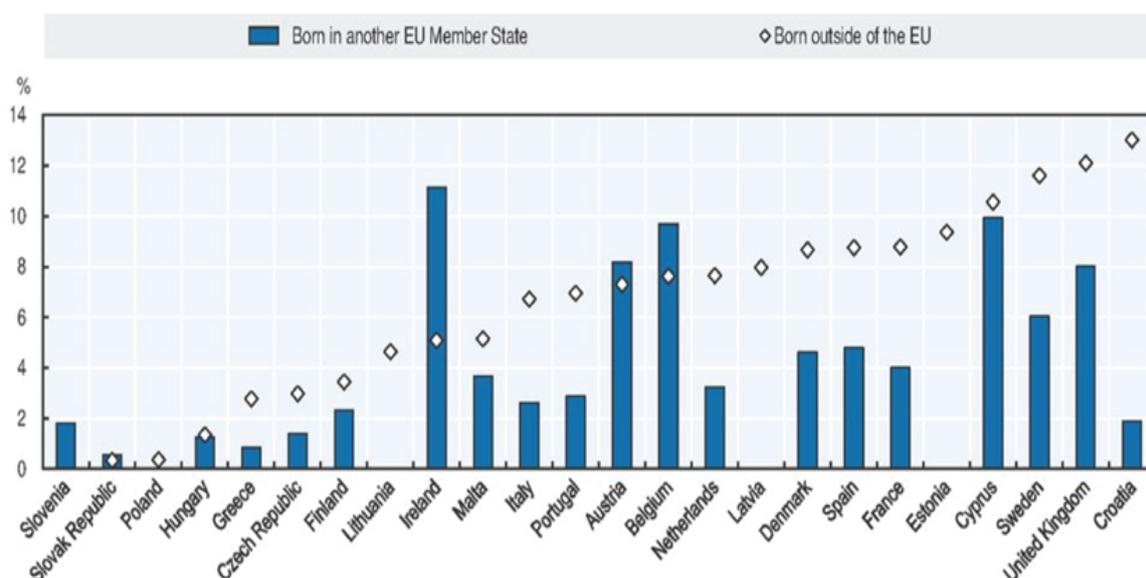
<sup>8</sup> OECD/European Union (2017), *The Missing Entrepreneurs 2017: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

self-employment when compared to their indigenous peers. Women also have lower figures of economic activity compared with men. This indicates the need for targeted measures such as migrant and refugee specific strands within mainstream enterprise support. Inclusive entrepreneurship policies have developed to respond to the needs of migrants, people with disabilities, seniors, women, young people and the unemployed. Some needs and measures may be common across these specific target groups, but migrants and specifically refugees and those still waiting for decisions on their asylum applications will have unique circumstances and needs.

In 2016, there were 30 million self-employed people in the EU, of which 3.4 million were migrants. The figures below show that migrant self-employment rates in Ireland are very healthy compared with its EU partners.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 1: Significance of immigrant self-employment by country, 2016**

Proportion of the self-employed who are immigrants (15-64 years old)



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However in view of the vulnerability of refugees and migrants to exploitation in the labour force, it is important to reference concerns with new forms of work and self-employment, mostly in the online space. Some highly skilled refugees and migrants may be able to become economically independent through selling their services online and maintaining autonomy and flexibility. However, there are new categories of ‘precarious’ work and some of these fall into ‘false self-employment’ (individuals who are dealt with by the companies who pay for their time and skills as being self-employed, but who are effectively employees). In supporting refugees and migrants into self-employment, advisors need to educate them about the dangers of self-employment.

<sup>9</sup> As footnote 8

## 4. Legislation and Policy on Refugee Protection in Ireland

Until new legislation was introduced recently, Ireland had a three stage asylum process, which resulted in lengthy first instance waiting times, further delays on appeals and a high rate of Judicial Reviews. The rate for being recognised as a Convention Refugee had been one of the lowest in the EU. Coupled with an outright ban on asylum seekers working or becoming self-employed, this statement from one asylum seeker sums up the loss of skills and confidence that the system engendered: *“Staying in Direct Provision and not being allowed to work had a huge impact on my life. Even now, after being out of Direct Provision for a year, I feel like the ghost of not being allowed to work is still entangling my life. Whenever I apply for a job, the response I get is ‘we are looking for someone who has at least 3 years’ experience’. Where do I get the experience if I haven’t been allowed to work for all the years I’ve been in Ireland?”*<sup>11</sup> In this context, when asylum seekers finally get their legal status to remain in Ireland, the chance of them taking the leap of faith required to become self-employed or set up a new enterprise, is extremely unlikely. With the prohibition on the right to work until people gained refugee status or other permission to remain in Ireland, there was an obvious correlation between the length of time an individual spent waiting for a decision, and their motivation and capability to enter employment or self-employment once they were permitted to do so. Therefore, reforming the asylum decision making system was as important as overturning the ban on asylum seekers’ access to the labour market or enterprise supports.

The International Protection Act came into force on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016.<sup>12</sup> The Act provides for the introduction of a single application procedure for asylum applicants and brings Ireland into line with the arrangements for the processing of protection applications in all other EU Member States. The Act was intended to streamline and expedite the processing of applications. Under the single procedure, an applicant will make only one application, and will have all grounds for seeking international protection and to be permitted to remain in the State examined and determined in one process. The Act retained the ban on work or self-employment until applicants had gained protection status and with it the right to remain in Ireland.

### Applications and granting of protection status at first instance: 2017<sup>13</sup>

	Applicants in 2017	Pending at end 2017	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Rejection	Refugee rate	Subs. Prot. rate	Rejection rate
<b>Total</b>	2,910	5,670	600	115	90	74.5%	14.5%	11.1%

<sup>11</sup> Irish Refugee Council-Policy Paper-The Right to Work for International Protection Applicants, July 2017

<sup>12</sup> Philip J O’Connell, 2018. "International Migration in Ireland, 2017," Working Papers 201809, Geary Institute, University College Dublin.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/republic-ireland/statistics>

In September 2015, in response to the growing numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean to Europe, and influenced very positively by local public opinion concerned about refugees fleeing from Syria, the Irish Government introduced the Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP).<sup>14</sup> The Irish Government agreed that Ireland would take in up to 4,000 refugees by the end of 2017 as a gesture of solidarity with our southern EU neighbours, through both relocation and resettlement programmes. Updated figures in February 2018 show that 785 refugees (including children) had been resettled from refugee camps in the Lebanon and 1,014 individuals had been relocated from Greece, to go through a fast track asylum procedure.<sup>15</sup> In addition, as part of fulfilling the original target, the Minister for Justice and Equality recently announced the Irish Humanitarian Admission Programme. This is an initiative to allow refugees and migrants already living in Ireland, to apply to bring in up to 530 family members from the 10 highest countries of origin which UNHCR records worldwide.<sup>16</sup>

However, there has been criticism from refugee advocacy groups about the lack of progress on completing Ireland's resettlement and relocation commitment.<sup>17</sup> Jesuit Refugee Service Ireland recently stated that a two-tier asylum system is emerging. This is because the asylum applications of refugees being relocated by Ireland under the IRPP from Greece and Turkey are being prioritised. This means that their status decisions are made within 12 weeks, whereas despite legal reforms, individuals who arrive independently to ask for asylum are now waiting up to 19 months to have their first interview.

## 5. Asylum Seekers and the Right to Work or Seek Self-Employment- From Supreme Court Judgement to The Re-cast Reception Directive

A Burmese man spent more than eight years waiting for a decision on his asylum application and had experienced depression and frustration due to not being able to work. He had been offered a job in the Refugee Accommodation Centre where he lived. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission was an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) in the case of *NHV v Minister for Justice and Equality* and the Commission's core submission was that non-citizens, including those seeking asylum or subsidiary protection, are entitled to invoke the right to work or earn a livelihood guaranteed under article 40.3.1 of the Constitution.<sup>18</sup>

An initial finding by the Irish Supreme Court in May 2017, found that, in an application system with no time limit as to when the decision making process will be concluded, an absolute ban on the right to seek employment for asylum seekers was unconstitutional. On 30 November 2017, the Court struck down the indefinite prohibition on the right of a person to work while in the asylum process, contained in the Refugee Act 1996 (and replicated in the International Protection Act 2015). The Supreme Court held that work is connected to the dignity and freedom of individuals and that the complete ban was not justified and

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<sup>14</sup> Philip J O'Connell, 2018. "International Migration in Ireland, 2017," Working Papers 201809, Geary Institute, University College Dublin.

<sup>15</sup>[http://www.integration.ie/en/isec/pages/irpp\\_statistics](http://www.integration.ie/en/isec/pages/irpp_statistics)

<sup>16</sup> Irish Refugee Protection Programme-Humanitarian Admission Programme, Department of Justice and Equality, May 2018

<sup>17</sup> Jesuit Refugee Service Ireland-Sharing Responsibility, Saving Lives

<sup>18</sup> Right to Work of People in Direct Provision – Commission welcomes Supreme Court decision, May 2017

contrary to the constitutional right to seek employment.<sup>19</sup> The Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan TD (Member of Parliament), embraced the findings of the Supreme Court. He committed Ireland to opting-in to the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive 2013 which will also greatly improve conditions and facilities for all those seeking asylum, by aligning them with EU norms and standards. In addition to labour market access, the provisions of the EU Directive include important provisions in relation to health, education and a daily expenses allowance.

In order to comply with the Court judgement, in early 2018, the Minister for Justice introduced temporary permissions for those who had been waiting 9 months for their asylum decision, both for employment and self-employment.<sup>20</sup> There was a lot of interest among asylum seekers in applying for work permits under this temporary scheme. However due to the severe restrictions on eligible types of employment and a €30,000/year minimum salary requirement, refugee advocacy groups reported that it was impossible for asylum seekers to obtain any employment since the scheme was set up. Over 500 temporary permits for self-employment were actually issued, but as the holders were not eligible to access any enterprise training, mentoring or financial supports, this scheme also proved illusory.

At the end of June 2018, the Minister for Justice and Equality announced how Ireland will implement the EU Reception Directive with regard to work and self-employment. There will be broad and generous access to the labour market for applicants who have been waiting at least 9 months for their asylum determination.<sup>21</sup> The Minister sees that effective access to the labour market for roughly 3,000 asylum seekers initially will help to alleviate their social and economic exclusion for applicants and avoid long-term dependency on the State. The directive which comes into force in July 2018 means asylum seekers will be entitled to apply for work in all sectors of employment except An Garda Síochána, the Defence Forces or the public and civil service.<sup>22</sup> Ireland is one of the few EU Member States to allow eligible asylum seekers to also engage in self-employment.

The Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission stated *“Ensuring a right to work while seeking asylum is critical to overcoming both direct and indirect discrimination, in overcoming barriers to integration, in ensuring equality in access to employment and effective enjoyment of the human right to work, and equal enjoyment of rights in the workplace. Most of all, the freedom to work to support oneself and one’s family is essential to human dignity.”*<sup>23</sup> The Commission will continue to review how these new provisions for people more than 9 months in the asylum process will be rolled out to ensure that the right to access work and self-employment are rights in practice rather than simply

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<sup>19</sup> Philip J O'Connell, 2018. "International Migration in Ireland, 2017," Working Papers 201809, Geary Institute, University College Dublin.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR18000053>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR18000213>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/refugee-groups-give-mixed-response-to-work-scheme-for-asylum-seekers-1.3546141>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ihrec.ie/human-rights-and-equality-commission-welcomes-scheme-to-grant-access-to-the-labour-market-for-applicants-for-international-protection/>

in principle. Particularly for self-employment, it will be crucial to ensure that asylum seekers can access all the State supports for those seeking to set up new enterprises.

## 6. Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship Supports in Ireland- the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance-A Unique Model and SICAP and Self Employment Supports for EU and non EU Migrants

It is now a normal part of social protection supports to encourage those who are receiving benefits to engage with training, further education and work experience in order to break the cycle of welfare dependence. However, in most EU countries the emphasis is on supporting welfare claimants enter or re-enter the workforce. However since 1993, Ireland has had a fairly unique scheme, the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) which is overseen by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP). This innovative enterprise support scheme, aimed at those who are long-term unemployed, is intended to encourage them to seriously consider self-employment as a possibility. The scheme targets individuals who have been receiving State welfare benefits for a specified length of time. The first step is an eligibility assessment. The scheme recognises the risks that individuals take when they decide to become self-employed or set up a new enterprise, which includes the uncertainty of income in the first year or two. The BTWEA is a non-statutory scheme approved by Government.<sup>24</sup> It is seen to have two purposes, the first to support those who have been welfare dependent to aspire to economic independence and the second, to ensure the establishment of new businesses. There is also a Short Term Enterprise Allowance (STEA). In December 2016, there were 11,386 participants on the BTWEA, including 409 on the STEA. Expenditure on the Scheme in 2016 was €126.2m.

The package of supports available to participants under the BTWEA consists of:

- A weekly payment equivalent to the full value of the main social welfare payment in the first year, tapering to three-quarters of the value in the second year of operation.
- Removal of the requirement to satisfy the condition of genuinely seeking work to receive the weekly allowance;
- Retention of secondary benefits; including medical card;
- Access to support, advice and mentoring by the DSP Case Officer and/or an Enterprise Officer in a Local Development Company (LDC); and
- Access to the Enterprise Support Grant (on approval by a DSP Case Officer). This is a DSP funded scheme.

The BTWEA provides a level of security for a person who is unemployed wishing to commence a new enterprise. It provides a guaranteed income for the first two years of their business. This, along with the package of other supports available, should increase the opportunity for success in a new enterprise.

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<sup>24</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, A Review of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, February 2017

As well as the BTWEA, there are a number of other agencies and programmes that also provide support for persons wishing to start their own businesses. These include:

#### Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

The LEOs provide advice, information and support to people in starting up or growing a business. They operate through the Local Authority network across the country and provide a wide range of experience, skills and services to people wishing to become self-employed. As part of their services, they provide a range of financial supports designed to assist with the establishment and/or growth of enterprises which employ up to 10 people. These include feasibility/innovation grants and business expansion grants.

#### Local Development Companies(LDCs) through the Leader Programme

The LDCs operate both the LEADER Programme and the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP). Both programmes provide a range of supports to people wishing to become self-employed.

#### The Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme

The LDCs operate both the LEADER Programme and the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP). Both programmes provide a range of supports to people wishing to become self-employed. (See Appendices 1 and 2 for EU and non EU migrant data on SICAP and self-employment supports).

#### Micro-Finance Ireland.

Micro-Finance Ireland provides small loans through the Government's Microenterprise Loan Fund. The purpose of the Fund is to help start-ups and established businesses to start-up a small business or expand your existing business. A micro-enterprise is a small business that has less than 10 employees and an annual turn-over of less than €2m. Micro-Finance Ireland helps these businesses by providing unsecured business loans of €2,000 to €25,000 for commercially viable proposals. Sole traders, Partnerships and Limited Companies are all eligible to apply. It works closely with LEOs and LDCs as well as the major banks, to provide viable businesses with the support they need to grow their business and create jobs.

During 2016 a review was undertaken to assess the extent to which the BWTEA meets its objectives and to identify best practice. The following specific features of the Irish BWTEA scheme which make it a model of good practice for refugees were outlined:

- Self-employment has been shown to be an appropriate route for refugees intending to become economically active for the first time (including those gaining legal status through the asylum system and those who are relocated from Greece and Turkey or resettled from Lebanon or elsewhere) Self-employment can also be a useful route for migrant workers who are eligible for State welfare payments and of course Irish nationals.

- The scheme has been seen to have an effective combination of mentoring and financial support.
- It has been observed to influence the setting up of new enterprises.

Overall, the review found that the scheme offers effective support for people who are long-term unemployed and other welfare recipients who are interested in self-employment as a route to entering, or re-entering, the labour market. Feedback from the customer survey with scheme participants indicated that the opportunity to support themselves and their families through self-employment was clearly welcomed in many cases. The assistance received via the scheme was highlighted in many of the responses; in particular, the combination of mentoring support and the financial assistance was seen as a key element of the scheme’s effectiveness and success. Recommendations of the review which have since been implemented include a pre-meeting in which the Case officer discusses the whole concept of self-employment with the applicant and does a more in-depth assessment of their suitability. At this stage an applicant may be referred to language classes or to a Start Your Own Business Course.

Budget 2017 introduced a change to the eligibility conditions for the BTWEA. From January 2017, jobseekers taking up self-employment have been able to access the BTWEA after 9 months, down from 12 months previously. This allows those wishing to commence self-employment at an earlier stage of their unemployment to access the BTWEA supports.

Age and gender of participants (all data from May 2016) <sup>25</sup>

Age Profile	BTWEA Participants	% of total BTWEA	Live Register >1yr	% of total LR >1Yr
<21	-	0%	8,159	3%
21 – 25	168	1%	29,522	10%
25 – 35	3,802	33%	80,253	26%
35 – 45	4,241	37%	71,586	23%
over 45	3,337	29%	117,539	38%
	<b>11,548</b>		<b>307,059</b>	

This data indicates that the typical BTWEA participant has an average age above that of individuals in who are registered as unemployed and in receipt of welfare payments, with 70% of participants between 25 and 45 years, compared with 49% of those who are in receipt of unemployment payments. This suggests that an unemployed person, with greater life experience, is more likely to seek to start their own enterprise.

<sup>25</sup> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, A Review of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, February 2017

While previously where an unemployed person is claiming welfare payments for their partner and family, only the person in receipt of the payment was eligible to apply for BWTEA, resulting in less women than men becoming recipients. This has now been changed to allow any 'qualified adult' to be a BWTEA applicant and the family as a whole is assessed to see who has the most suitable motivation and skills to be likely to succeed in self-employment.

Supporting the long-term unemployed to commence self-employment has been seen to be a valuable means to achieve new enterprise growth for this cohort, as illustrated by the number of participants on the BTWEA (approx. 12,000 each year in 2015 & 2016). When BTWEA participants were compared to other unemployed individuals who did not choose the BTWEA as an option, the BTWEA participant was over twice as likely to remain economically active six months after the end of participation on the BTWEA. This trend continues when examined following an 18 month period after the BTWEA payments ceased.

While the DEASP has a role in encouraging suitable people to consider self-employment, the expertise required to nurture the business idea and encourage a new start-up is held within the network of LEOs and LDCs. If we consider the current BTWEA objectives, it is evident that DSP, through this scheme, provides the financial support and that the existing support network - of the LDCs and the LEOs - are best placed to provide the other supports to enhance the rate of survival and growth.

## 7. Refugee Self-Employment –First Steps and Future Needs- Experience on the Ground

A Caseworker employed by a local non-governmental project works in a Direct Provision Centre (State funded privately operated accommodation centre for refugees). He provides information, sign-posting and referrals to specific training, job-seeking and self-employment supports for people still in the asylum process and those who have been recognized as Convention refugees or who have another type of International Protection status. He observed that for those with refugee status and leave to remain, there are no specific targeted supports available locally for refugees, so they rely on existing mainstream supports. In the town of Drogheda in County Louth, they register with the DEASP as job seekers to be referred for education and training programmes. If they want to set up their own business, they are referred to the BWTEA section. Due to a national housing crisis in Ireland, people may still be living in refugee accommodation centres for up to three years after they are recognized as refugees or granted another International Protection status, before setting up a business. This means they are already eligible (9 months on welfare benefits for those who are unemployed) for the BWTEA when they move out into independent accommodation. While they remain in the accommodation provided by the State for refugees, people with status still get the same welfare allowance as those still in

the asylum system, but since it is administered by the Department of Social Welfare, they are eligible for and can access the BWTEA.

The local Cultural Integration project did an internal baseline study with their refugee clients to identify their needs relating to entering the labour market and setting up a business. Recognition of non EU qualifications still present difficulties, even for refugees with status. Even if someone has had a business in their own country, the business culture, systems and environment do not equate to Irish business experience. Funding only allows the project caseworker to spend one day per week in the refugee accommodation centre, so he does not have enough time to support all 112 people who have status and need advice on education and training. In addition, with the very recent opening up of the rights to work and to be self-employed, to those who have been in the asylum process for 9 months, the number of those requiring information and referrals to employment and enterprise services will continue to increase.

Local experience shows that two refugees with status have already accessed mainstream BWTEA training and supports and their experience has been positive. One person started a catering business which began with cooking for friends and will initially take off as a commercial business from home. The other person is a lone parent, so with childcare as a barrier, progress to self-employment will be slower.

The caseworker identified the following gaps between the service he provides as a mentor/trainer and the services delivered by mainstream agencies:

- Information is the key gap, either they have none or little relevant information and not in languages or a form of English they understand.
- Refugees rely for information on people who have gone through the system who they know, and they may not get accurate or up to date information and may be discouraged from progressing further.
- Coming from different language backgrounds, refugees need training delivered in basic English they can understand and they also need an emphasis on their cultural needs and intercultural communication.
- From their research, the 16 to 25 age group are comfortable with an IT interface for learning but those from 25-36 would prefer to have a face to face tutor than use an IT interface. (25 surveyed).
- People with status have the right to access employment, but are living in refugee accommodation centres, so they are perceived to be

unequal to people living independently outside the centres. They are living on reduced payments so they are unable to spend funds to seek employment or self-employment. The housing crisis is impacting hugely on people moving into self-employment. Refugees living in the isolated refugee accommodation centres are required to attend meetings with officials from the DEASP or its contracted agencies. All such assessment and training meetings are held in a local town to which they either wait for a free bus at fixed times, or they need to find the money to pay for a private bus service. If they miss such scheduled meetings, they risk having their welfare payments discontinued. Because of the system they are required to live in, and the challenges of finding private rented accommodation, the logistics are out of their control.

This local project has good links with local mainstream employment support agencies. The project did not succeed in getting EU Integration funds through the Department of Justice and Equality for integration activities. Instead they have a Government grant for the new Network project, which is a partnership with the Local Area Partnership (statutory/community/business network agency). In the first project initiative, six refugee women did a Taster course and three did an accredited course (QQI Level 3). The project secured adequate funding to provide essential Childcare. To be eligible for this project, women have to have refugee status or another type of permission to remain which confers the right to work. The local project currently has no funding to provide equivalent courses for refugee men and it is not currently funded to work with asylum seekers, only people with refugee or other protection status.

A second Network course was run for forty two refugee women to prepare them for possible jobs at the nearby Dublin airport. This is an Academy of Aviation Training which delivered a Passenger Customer Service course consisting of four days training resulting in a nationally recognised qualification. On completion, the participants did an interview with an employer based at Dublin airport. Nine women completed the training, and two of these are now employed in the airport. This course will be repeated with eleven more refugee women. The courses also covered Intercultural Awareness in the Workplace, CV preparation and job interview skills.

Since 2017, UNHCR Ireland has participated in the global Refugee Food Festival which was started in France in 2016. In 2018 the public book to eat meals in high quality restaurants, cooked by chefs who are among the relocated and resettled refugees living here. The proceeds of the 2018 festival went to support scholarships for refugees to get accredited academic training to equip them to enter employment or self-employment here in Ireland.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/food-and-drink/irish-restaurants-welcome-refugee-chefs-and-bakers-1.3463623>

In view of the current severe skills shortage for qualified chefs, this is a very creative and innovative response which can support refugees into existing gaps in the labour market and also contribute to highlighting the skills and talents refugees can contribute to Irish society. Other projects such as the Sligo Global Kitchen and Our Table in Dublin are also using food to develop connections between refugees and local people and to support refugee women to gain skills they can use to obtain employment or become self-employed.<sup>27 28</sup>

## 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

With the recent opting in of the Irish Government to the recast EU Reception Directive, and the granting of the rights to work and to take up self-employment to 3,000 asylum seekers, there now appear to be great opportunities to widen the employment and enterprise supports for those who come to Ireland fleeing persecution. The following are some recommendations which may be useful to inform the TREND programme work in Ireland:

- Agencies interacting with refugees need to have staff dedicated to working with this target group. It is also vital to ensure that they receive appropriate training to understand the refugee specific experience including issues of trauma which may be related to country of origin, the refugee journey or the challenges of communal living in accommodation centres. Cultural competence and anti-racism training are also crucial. People leaving refugee accommodation centres have unique needs compared with persons born and reared in Ireland. There are language and cultural communication issues, a fear of authority, stress and trauma from living in uncertainty and in a system which disempowers them. Individuals will also have different levels of resilience and personal confidence and they may need an advocate to go with them to meetings with officials and service providers.
- Transport costs to avail of supports for job seeking and self-employment available in Dublin such as EPIC run by Business in the Community, are currently only officially available to relocated and resettled refugees, not to those who have gained status through the asylum determination procedure. With the opening up of the right to work to people in the asylum system, all those eligible to work should be financially supported to access mainstream job seeking and enterprise supports, be they in the local town or the city.
- The location of training and supports to be delivered by TREND during the "test group training" may be important. If refugees are living in specific accommodation centres and lack sufficient funds for public transport, they may be unable to access courses delivered in certain locations. The refugee accommodation centre in Co

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/foodsies/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://christchurchcathedral.ie/table-cafe-now-open/>

Meath has its own classrooms (an Education and Training Board facility) which could be used for TREND to deliver training during the testing phase.

- The availability of childcare is an issue for parents and tends to disproportionately impact on women's access to training and other supports.
- Men and specifically young men form a significant cohort of refugees in Ireland, both in the asylum process and among resettled and relocated groups. Pressure to earn money may push some of these men into precarious or unofficial employment, so while projects focusing on the unique needs of refugee women are very welcome (current Irish Refugee Council and Cultur programmes), it is vital that other sub groups within the refugee population are also considered when funding for programmes is being allocated.

#### Appendix 1

These excel spreadsheets show the socio-economic characteristics of migrants supported under SICAP in 2017. In total there were 48,330 individuals supported under SICAP in 2017, for 18% of them the nationality was non-Irish and the socio-economic characteristics were provided for this group. The data was generated by Pobal staff on request from their IRIS database.

#### Appendix 2

These excel spreadsheets relate to the self-employment supports and progression of non-Irish individuals under SICAP in 2017.

