

Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report
Universal Periodic Review: 4th Cycle, 53rd Session

IRELAND

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ireland acceded to the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* in 1956 and to its *1967 Protocol* in 1968. Ireland also acceded to the *1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* and the *1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*, in 1962 and 1973 respectively.

Ireland has been a member of the European Union (EU) since 1973. Under special protocols, Ireland participates selectively in EU asylum, migration and border measures.¹ As of March 2026, Ireland is bound by the Dublin III Regulation, the recast Eurodac Regulation, the Qualification Directive and the Asylum Procedures Directive, and, since 2018, the recast Reception Conditions Directive. Ireland does not participate in the Family Reunification Directive. In July 2024, the European Commission confirmed Ireland's decision to opt into the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.² From June 2026, Ireland will be bound by most EU Pact instruments.³ As a non-Schengen State, Ireland cannot opt into Schengen-based measures, including the Screening Regulation or the Return Border Procedures Regulation, although it intends to align national legislation where feasible.

Ireland has a well-established international protection procedure, currently governed by the *International Protection Act 2015*. Beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to apply for family reunification under that Act. The International Protection Bill 2026,⁴ currently before the Oireachtas (Irish National Parliament), represents a substantive reform of this framework, including measures to implement Ireland's commitments under the Pact and significant changes to family reunification. Citizenship is governed by the *Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956* (as amended).

By November 2026, when Ireland undergoes its review, it will have assumed the six-month rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU. This Presidency (running from July to December

¹ Unlike most EU Member States, Ireland does not automatically take part in EU laws on asylum, immigration and external border control. Under Protocol No.21 annexed to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Ireland may choose on a case-by-case basis whether to participate in individual Justice and Home Affairs measures, including those on asylum and migration.

² The European Commission confirmed Ireland's opt-in to seven legislative measures of the EU Pact through seven individual Commission Decisions, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/european-commissions-decisions-irelands-participation-seven-legislative-acts-eu-pact-migration-and_en.

³ EU Pact measures that Ireland will be bound by include the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation, the Asylum Procedures Regulation, the revised Eurodac Regulation, the Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation, the Qualification Regulation, and the recast Reception Conditions Directive. Ireland is already bound by the Resettlement Framework Regulation and the Regulation establishing the EU Agency for Asylum.

⁴ International Protection Bill 2026, Bill No. 6 of 2026, as passed by Dáil Éireann on 25 February 2026. References in this submission are to the version as passed by Dáil Éireann and do not reflect subsequent amendments, https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2026/6/eng/ver_a/b06a26d.pdf.

2026) coincides with the transition to the EU Pact and will place Ireland in a central role in supporting and shaping its implementation across Member States.⁵

In 2025, 13,162 individuals applied for international protection in Ireland,⁶ a 29 per cent decrease compared with 2024 (18,561).⁷ The top five countries of origin were Somalia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Georgia.

II. ACHIEVEMENTS AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS⁸

UNHCR welcomes the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) assuming responsibility for monitoring the quality of International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) Accommodation Centres in January 2024.⁹ This development strengthens Ireland's oversight framework for reception conditions. HIQA's independent statutory mandate enhances transparency, consistency and accountability in monitoring compliance with the National Standards. While HIQA's current remit applies only to permanent IPAS Accommodation Centres, covering a limited proportion of facilities and residents,¹⁰ it provides a solid foundation for future expansion of independent oversight. UNHCR encourages continued investment in HIQA's inspection capacity and the progressive extension of its remit to all accommodation settings, including emergency accommodation.

III. KEY PROTECTION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue 1: Access to adequate and dignified accommodation¹¹

Since Ireland's last Universal Periodic Review, arrivals of both international protection applicants and beneficiaries of temporary protection have increased substantially. Annual international protection applications have exceeded 13,000 since 2022,¹² compared with fewer than 5,000 per year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³ Approximately 125,000 refugees from Ukraine have been granted temporary protection since activation of the Temporary Protection Directive,¹⁴ with an estimated 84,100 remaining active in administrative systems in February 2026.¹⁵ This has placed sustained pressure on Ireland's accommodation capacity.

⁵ UNHCR, *Recommendations to the Cypriot and Irish 2026 Presidencies of the Council of the European Union (January – December 2026)*, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/polrec/unhcr/2025/en/150581>.

⁶ IPO, *Statistics Report for December 2025*, <https://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/IPO/20260109%20IPO%20Monthly%20Website%20Stats%20Dec%202025%20FINAL.pdf/Files/20260109%20IPO%20Monthly%20Website%20Stats%20Dec%202025%20FINAL.pdf>.

⁷ IPO, *Statistics Report for December 2024*, <https://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/IPO/20250122%20IPO%20Monthly%20Website%20Stats%20Dec%202024%20FINAL.pdf/Files/20250122%20IPO%20Monthly%20Website%20Stats%20Dec%202024%20FINAL.pdf>.

⁸ Linked to 3rd cycle UPR recommendation no. 157.259.

⁹ European Communities (Reception Conditions) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 (S.I. No. 649/2023), <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2023/si/649/made/en/print>.

¹⁰ According to IPAS Weekly Accommodation and Arrivals Statistics (27 February 2026), 309 centres were accommodating 33,170 people, including 9,849 children. Of these, the majority, 25,734 individuals, were residing in 257 emergency centres, which are not subject to HIQA inspection. Only the 50 permanent centres, accommodating 6,911 individuals, fall within HIQA's current inspection remit. Source: IPAS, *Weekly Accommodation and Arrivals Statistics*, 27 February 2026, https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/f45ffe1f/IPAS_Weekly_Report_we_22_02_2026.pdf.

¹¹ Linked to 3rd cycle UPR recommendations, *inter alia*, nos. 157.251, 157.254, 157.255, and 157.260.

¹² IPO, *Statistics Report (2022-2025)*, <https://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/statistics>. Applications number: 13,651 (2022), 13,277 (2023), 18,561 (2024), 13,162 (2025).

¹³ IPO, *Statistics Report (2017-2019)*, <https://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/statistics>. Applications number: 2,926 (2017), 3,673 (2018) and 4,781 (2019).

¹⁴ Oireachtas, *Parliamentary Question No. 425*, 26 February 2026, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-02-26/425/>.

¹⁵ Central Statistics Office, *Arrivals from Ukraine in Ireland – Series 18*, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ftp/p-ai/arrivalsfromukraineinirelandseries18/>.

A 2021 White Paper committed to ending Direct Provision,¹⁶ and replacing it with an accommodation model involving an initial stay in a State-provided centre followed by community-based accommodation.¹⁷ However, planning assumptions were overtaken by rising arrivals, requiring the Government to reassess projected capacities and timelines.¹⁸

In response, a Comprehensive Accommodation Strategy (CAS) was adopted in 2024,¹⁹ aiming to expand reception capacity to 35,000 by the end of 2028 and reduce reliance on commercial providers and emergency accommodation. Central to the strategy is the development of a more sustainable and blended model with an expanded State-provided accommodation portfolio. The 2025 Programme for Government reiterates these commitments.²⁰

Despite these commitments, Ireland continues to experience persistent pressures within the reception system. Although State-provided capacity has expanded, the system remains overwhelmingly dependent on contracted and emergency accommodation.²¹ Emergency settings, where most applicants are currently housed, raise quality and oversight concerns, as they are not subject to the same contractual obligations and fall outside HIQA's inspection remit. This creates substantial challenges in ensuring consistency and compliance across the system. HIQA has reported fewer centres within its remit and noted that by late 2025 approximately 90 per cent of accommodation settings were neither independently monitored nor required to comply with the National Standards.²²

Similar challenges affect beneficiaries of temporary protection. Of the approximately 84,000 individuals present in Ireland, only around 23,000 are in State-provided accommodation, with the remainder in private arrangements.²³ No national standards framework exists for State-provided temporary protection accommodation, and neither State-provided nor private accommodation are subject to monitoring.

These pressures are compounded by Ireland's wider housing shortage, which limits move-on options. As of December 2025, approximately 5,000 people with permission to remain in Ireland were unable to exit IPAS accommodation because of housing shortages.²⁴

¹⁶ Direct Provision refers to Ireland's reception system for international protection applicants, providing accommodation alongside ancillary supports such as food, healthcare, and a weekly allowance, while their claims are being processed. It does not apply to beneficiaries of Temporary Protection, who are accommodated under separate arrangements.

¹⁷ Government of Ireland, *White Paper on Ending Direct Provision*, <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/white-paper-on-ending-direct-provision-03e5db80-9f45-473a-8280-d9211a9b302c.pdf>.

¹⁸ The 2021 White Paper projected approximately 3,500 international protection applicants per year, a figure that did not align with subsequent increases in arrivals: 13,651 applications in 2022; 13,277 in 2023; 18,561 in 2024; and 13,162 in 2025.

¹⁹ Government of Ireland, *Comprehensive Accommodation Strategy for International Protection Applicants*, <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/comprehensive-accommodation-strategy-for-international-protection-applicants.pdf>.

²⁰ Government of Ireland, *Programme for Government for Government: Securing Ireland's Future*, <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/programme-for-government-securing-irelands-future.pdf>.

²¹ As of 22 February 2026, 33,170 people, including 9,849 children, were accommodated across 309 centres. The majority, 25,734 individuals, were residing in 257 emergency centres, while 6,911 individuals were accommodated in 50 IPAS Accommodation Centres. Source: IPAS, *Weekly Accommodation and Arrivals Statistics, 27 February 2026*, https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/f45ffe1f/IPAS_Weekly_Report_we_22_02_2026.pdf. Although State-provided capacity has expanded from approximately 900 beds in recent years to nearly 4,000 places by early 2026, this growth has not reduced reliance on contracted provision where around 29,000 applicants continue to live. Source: Oireachtas, *Committee of Public Accounts, 19 February 2026*, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/committee_of_public_accounts/2026-02-19/7/.

²² HIQA, *Monitoring of International Protection Accommodation Service Centres in 2025*, <https://www.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2026-02/International-Protection-Accommodation-Services-Overview-Report-2025.pdf>.

²³ Oireachtas, *Committee of Public Accounts, 19 February 2026*, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/committee_of_public_accounts/2026-02-19/7/.

²⁴ Oireachtas, *Parliamentary Question No. 431, 2 December 2025*, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-12-02/431/>.

Tented accommodation continues to be used during periods of acute pressure,²⁵ and HIQA has highlighted concerns regarding dignity, privacy, and prolonged stays in such facilities.²⁶ These pressures have coincided with repeated periods in which newly arrived adult male applicants were not immediately provided with accommodation and experienced homelessness. The first such period occurred in January 2023, affecting more than 1,500 applicants. A second, larger shortfall began in December 2023 and continues, peaking at more than 3,500 individuals without accommodation in February 2025 before declining to approximately 530 by January 2026.²⁷

In April 2023, the High Court in *S.Y.* found that failure to provide accommodation breached the recast Reception Conditions Directive and the right to dignity.²⁸ In December 2023, the High Court referred related questions in *S.A. and R.J.* to the Court of Justice of the European Union,²⁹ which in August 2025 held in Case C-97/24 that Ireland could not rely on *force majeure* to avoid liability for inadequate reception conditions,³⁰ with UNHCR intervening in the proceedings.³¹ Following this ruling, compensation was awarded in early 2026,³² and further representative proceedings remain before the Supreme Court.³³

Since 2022, Ireland has experienced rising community tensions around accommodation sites, including protests and incidents of threatening behaviours and violence.³⁴ Misinformation and disinformation have further contributed to heightened local tensions.³⁵

Under the EU Pact, Ireland anticipates a tiered reception model comprising Screening Centres, Border Procedure Centres, Standard Needs Centres and Basic Needs Centres,³⁶ with a significant proportion of applicants expected to be processed in dedicated border procedure facilities, including the recently purchased State-owned Citywest complex.³⁷ The National Implementation Plan also notes that commercial contingency and emergency

²⁵ Reliance on tented accommodation has decreased, from five sites accommodating approximately 930 men in October 2024 to one site housing around 90 men at present. Source: IPAS, *Weekly Accommodation and Arrivals Statistics*, 9 October 2024. <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/06102024-ipas-weekly-statistics.pdf> and IPAS, *Weekly Accommodation and Arrivals Statistics*, 27 February 2026. https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/f45ffe1f/IPAS_Weekly_Report_we_22_02_2026.pdf.

²⁶ Although HIQA does not typically monitor tented accommodation, it inspected an IPAS accommodation centre with a co-located tented facility. Source: HIQA, *Inspection Report: Knockalisheen*, 4 June 2025. https://www.hiqa.ie/system/files?file=inspectionreports/8440_Knockalisheen_4_June_2025.pdf.

²⁷ IPAS, *Statistics on International Protection Applicants Not Offered Accommodation*, 10 February 2026. <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/publications/statistics-on-international-protection-applicants-not-offered-accommodation/>.

²⁸ *S.Y. v Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth & Ors* [2023] IEHC 187. https://www2.courts.ie/acc/alfresco/599db9da-fb81-48fc-9cfb-cbbdfa313df5/2023_IEHC_187.pdf/pdf#view=fitH.

²⁹ *S.A. and R.J. v Minister of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Ireland and the Attorney General* [2023] IEHC 717. https://www2.courts.ie/acc/alfresco/1ae1aec7-8040-4e6f-a0a6-97ea9e296855/2023_IEHC_717.pdf/pdf#view=fitH.

³⁰ Court of Justice of the European Union, Case C-97/24, Judgment of 1 August 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:62024CJ0097>.

³¹ UNHCR, *Written observations submitted to the Court of Justice of the European Union in Case C-97/24 (amicus curiae)*. <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/amicus/unhcr/2024/en/148057>.

³² *S.A. v The Minister For Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Ors, R.J. v The Minister For Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Ors* [2026] IEHC 90. https://www2.courts.ie/acc/alfresco/bbba8163-cae7-4e59-b599-44ef8b10275c/2026_IEHC_90.pdf/pdf#view=fitH.

³³ *IHREC v Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth & anor* [2024] IEHC 493. https://www2.courts.ie/acc/alfresco/173c9396-0529-4a34-9281-fd4441e5c1e6/2024_IEHC_493.pdf/pdf#view=fitH and *IHREC v Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth & Ors* [2025] IECA 156. https://www2.courts.ie/acc/alfresco/27870189-533a-487f-adad-d426a28a5cf0/2025_IECA_156-1.pdf/pdf#view=fitH.

³⁴ RTÉ Prime Time, *Mapped: The fires linked to accommodation for migrants*. <https://www.rte.ie/news/primetime/2024/0207/1431003-mapped-the-fires-linked-to-accommodation-for-migrants/> and RTÉ Investigates, *Inside the Protests: Cameras capture moment Coolock site attacked*. <https://about.rte.ie/2024/09/19/rte-investigates-inside-the-protests-captures-moment-coolock-site-attacked/>.

³⁵ RTÉ News, *Copycat arson attacks feared after 16 fires in a year*. <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2024/0119/1427400-arson-attacks/>.

³⁶ Government of Ireland, *National Asylum and Migration Management Strategy*. https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/National_Asylum_and_Migration_Management_Strategy_for_Ireland_Final.pdf.

³⁷ Oireachtas, *Dáil Éireann Debate*, 24 September 2025. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2025-09-24/17/>.

accommodation will continue to be necessary to maintain flexibility in responding to fluctuations in arrivals.³⁸

Recommendations: UNHCR recommends that the Government of Ireland:

- a) Continue and accelerate efforts to expand State-provided accommodation, with adequate investment to deliver targets set out in the CAS, with a view to reducing reliance on emergency accommodation.
- b) Ensure that all forms of accommodation used within the reception system, including emergency accommodation and any new facilities established under the Pact, comply with the National Standards and are subject to an independent inspection and oversight framework.
- c) Strengthen contingency planning to ensure timely access to appropriate accommodation for all newly arrived applicants and prevent situations in which individuals are left homeless.
- d) Prioritise measures that support positive community engagement around accommodation centres, counter misinformation and disinformation about the international protection system, and address intimidation or harassment directed at applicants or accommodation sites.

Additional protection challenges

Issue 2: Access to appropriate accommodation for unaccompanied children

Since Ireland's last Universal Periodic Review, the number of unaccompanied children (UAC) seeking international protection, including those from Ukraine, has increased significantly,³⁹ placing considerable pressure on Tusla's Separated Children Seeking International Protection (SCSIP) service, including accommodation capacity and the child protection system.

UAC are accommodated across a range of settings, including foster care, residential units, supported lodgings and Special Emergency Arrangements (SEAs). SEAs were introduced as a short-term emergency measure, involving accommodating children in hotels, B&Bs or leased properties⁴⁰ that fall outside the National Standards for Children's Residential Centres,⁴¹ and are not subject to HIQA inspections. Reliance on SEAs peaked in 2024, when more than 560 children were accommodated,⁴² and has continued into 2026. As of the week of 8 February 2026, 84 UAC were placed in SEAs.⁴³ While Tusla has expanded capacity, including opening 20 new residential centres in 2024, providing 128 additional beds,⁴⁴ these measures have not yet fully alleviated the need for emergency arrangements.

Several stakeholders have expressed concern regarding the ongoing use of SEAs, including HIQA, which has identified the need to strengthen governance within the SCSIP service in light

³⁸ Government of Ireland, *EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: National Implementation Plan*, https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/IE-EU_Pact_National_Implementation_Plan_Ireland.pdf.

³⁹ Referrals of unaccompanied children increased from 80 in 2020 to 152 in 2021, before rising sharply to 597 in 2022, 530 in 2023 and 619 in 2024. Corresponding admissions to care also increased: 64 (2020), 86 (2021), 350 (2022), 432 (2023) and 570 (2024). These figures are drawn from Tusla's annual Review of Adequacy and Annual Report series: Tusla, *Review of Adequacy Report 2020*, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/TUSLA_English_Annual_Report_Spreads.pdf; *Review of Adequacy Report 2021*, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Review_of_Adequacy_Report_2021_Final.pdf; *Annual Report & Financial Statements 2022*, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Annual_Report_FS_2022.pdf; *Review of Adequacy Report 2023*, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Review_of_Adequacy_Report_2023.pdf; and *Review of Adequacy Report 2024*, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Review_of_Adequacy_Report_2024_Final_01_08_2025.pdf.

⁴⁰ Tusla, *2022 Annual Review on the Adequacy of Child Care and Family Support Services Available*, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Review_of_Adequacy_Report_2022.pdf.

⁴¹ HIQA, *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, 2018, <https://www.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2018-11/national-standards-for-childrens-residential-centres.pdf>.

⁴² Tusla, *Review of Adequacy Report 2024*, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Review_of_Adequacy_Report_2024_Final_01_08_2025.pdf.

⁴³ Oireachtas, *Parliamentary Question No. 92*, 19 February 2026, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-02-19/92/>.

⁴⁴ Tusla, *Review of Adequacy Report 2024*, (n.42).

of increased arrivals, rapid expansion of SEAs and gaps in oversight structures.⁴⁵ In response to investigative reporting on the quality and safety of SEAs used for both UAC and other children in care, the Ombudsman for Children described the findings as “very concerning” and consistent with complaints his office has received about such placements.⁴⁶ Judiciary commentary has similarly highlighted risks associated with unregulated emergency placements.⁴⁷ Civil society organisations have warned that UAC placed in unregulated accommodation face heightened risks, including inadequate supervision, delayed access to education and healthcare, and insufficient preparation for aftercare.⁴⁸ Tusla’s own service reporting identifies reliance on SEAs as a key organisational risk affecting its ability to meet care standards.⁴⁹

Recommendations: UNHCR recommends that the Government of Ireland:

- a) Continue and accelerate efforts to expand appropriate, regulated placements, including family-based care, supported lodgings and residential units, with a view to phasing out the use of SEAs.
- b) Pending the discontinuation of SEAs, ensure strengthened safeguards and oversight in all emergency accommodation used for UAC, including independent inspection and regulatory oversight, adequate staffing levels, and appropriate safeguarding standards, while ensuring that all personnel working with children are appropriately qualified and Garda-vetted.

Issue 3: Safeguards for children and applicants with specific needs

At the time of submission, Ireland is finalising significant reforms to its international protection legislation through the International Protection Bill 2026 to implement the EU Pact. This legislative reform provides an important opportunity to strengthen mechanisms for the early identification of applicants with specific needs and strengthen safeguards to prevent the detention of children and other applicants with specific needs.

While the introduction of preliminary vulnerability checks in the International Protection Bill 2026 represents an important step towards the early identification of applicants with special reception needs or in need of special procedural guarantees, such screenings cannot replace the comprehensive assessments required under EU law.⁵⁰ Identification must be carried out as early as possible after first contact with the authorities and must remain continuous throughout the procedure, as special needs may emerge or become apparent only at later stages. Ensuring timely and ongoing identification is essential to guarantee that applicants with specific needs receive the supports required to participate effectively in the procedure.

There are concerns regarding provisions in the International Protection Bill 2026 which, for the first time in Irish law, permit the detention of children during the screening stage in “exceptional circumstances”, for a period not exceeding 12 hours and in a facility that is neither a prison, a

⁴⁵ HIQA, *Regulation Directorate monitoring inspection of Child Protection and Welfare Services - Separated Children Seeking International Protection*, https://www.higa.ie/system/files?file=inspectionreports/8511_CPW SCIP_20250128.pdf. Note: HIQA is not responsible for inspecting SEAs.

⁴⁶ The Journal Investigates, *Vulnerable children spending years in Tusla’s temporary Special Emergency Arrangements*, 13 February 2026, <https://www.thejournal.ie/investigates-tusla-special-emergency-arrangements-6954757-Feb2026/>.

⁴⁷ Law Society of Ireland, *Tusla must end ‘special’ care placements – judge*, 20 February 2026, <https://www.lawsociety.ie/gazette/top-stories/2026/feb/tusla-must-end-special-care-placements--judge/> and Law Society of Ireland, *State warned of risks over children in care*, 17 July 2023, <https://www.lawsociety.ie/gazette/top-stories/2023/july/state-warned-of-risks-over-children-in-care/>.

⁴⁸ Empowering People in Care (EPIC), *Be Strong – There’s so many problems waiting: The Experiences of Separated Children Seeking International Protection in Ireland*, October 2025, <https://www.epiconline.ie/app/uploads/2025/10/Be-Strong-Theres-so-many-problems-waiting-The-Experiences-of-Separated-Children-Seeking-International-Protection-in-Ireland.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Tusla, *Annual Report and Financial Statements 2024*, Appendix 2: Summary of National Corporate Risks, <https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla%20Annual%20Report%202024.pdf>.

⁵⁰ UNHCR, *Advocacy Brief: Screening and identification of persons with vulnerabilities under the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum*, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/intlegcomments/unhcr/2025/en/150580>.

children's detention school nor a police station.⁵¹ Children should never be detained for immigration-related purposes, irrespective of their legal or migratory status or that of their parents, and detention is never in their best interests.⁵² The Ombudsman for Children has expressed concern that permitting the detention of children, even for short periods and under exceptional circumstances, is never in their best interests and constitutes a violation of their rights.⁵³

In addition to concerns relating to children, the detention provisions in the Bill, which are incomplete at the time of this submission as further government amendments are expected, do not include safeguards to prevent the detention of applicants with specific reception or procedural needs. The absence of explicit exemptions and protections for such applicants, may expose them to significant barriers and harm in detention settings.

Recommendations: UNHCR recommends that the Government of Ireland:

- a) Introduce a statutory requirement for a comprehensive assessment of special reception needs and special procedural guarantees, in line with EU law, including provision for re-assessment whenever such needs arise at any stage of the procedure.
- b) Delete Sections 24(11)-(13) of the International Protection Bill 2026 and explicitly prohibit the detention of children during the screening procedure and throughout the international protection process.
- c) Explicitly prohibit the detention of children and other applicants with specific needs.

Issue 4: Right to family reunification

In 2025, 669 people were granted permission to enter Ireland under family reunification, compared with 979 in 2024.⁵⁴ Refugee family reunification represents a very small proportion of overall arrivals in Ireland.

At the time of submission, the International Protection Bill 2026 introduces more restrictive family reunification provisions. These include a mandatory two-year waiting period before a sponsor may apply for eligible family members, as well as financial self-sufficiency requirements, including minimum income thresholds and restrictions on accessing certain social welfare or housing supports, with limited exceptions. These measures represent a substantial departure from the current framework under the International Protection Act 2015, which does not impose such waiting periods or financial criteria. As Ireland does not participate in the Family Reunification Directive, family reunification for beneficiaries of international protection is determined solely by domestic law.

Mandatory waiting periods may prolong family separation and leave family members in precarious or unsafe situations, with adverse consequences for the well-being, stability and integration prospects of refugees in Ireland. Such delays are inconsistent with Article 10 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which requires family reunification applications to be dealt with in a positive, humane and expeditious manner. Financial self-sufficiency requirements may similarly create significant barriers, particularly for newly arrived refugees who may face practical barriers in accessing stable employment and income. These requirements are likely to have disproportionate impacts on beneficiaries with specific needs, including single parents and survivors of trauma.

⁵¹ See section 24(11)-(13) of the International Protection Bill 2026.

⁵² UNHCR, *Position regarding the detention of refugee and migrant children in the migration context*, January 2017, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2017/115250>.

⁵³ Ombudsman for Children's Office, *Strengthening the International Protection Bill 2026 from a Children's Rights Perspective – Recommendations from the Ombudsman for Children's Office*, <https://www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2026/02/OCO-amendments-to-the-International-Protection-Bill-2026.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Oireachtas, *Parliamentary Question No. 149*, 27 January 2026, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-01-27/149/>.

For several years, applicants have also faced significant delays in the processing of family reunification applications, with some beneficiaries waiting more than 18 months for a decision. High application volumes and limited staffing contribute to these delays, which hinder family unity and may impede effective integration. Such delays are also inconsistent with Article 10 of the CRC.

Recommendations: UNHCR recommends that the Government of Ireland:

- a) Remove mandatory waiting periods from the proposed legislative framework governing family reunification for beneficiaries of international protection to avoid prolonged family separation.
- b) Remove income and self-sufficiency requirements from the proposed legislative framework for family reunification, recognising the structural barriers faced by newly arrived refugees.
- c) Restore broader eligibility criteria for dependent family members in recognition of their right to enjoy family life and the principle of family unity.

Issue 5: Prevention and reduction of statelessness

Statelessness remains a largely overlooked phenomenon in Ireland, and stateless persons continue to be a relatively invisible population within national systems. UNHCR identified in its 2023 report *Mapping Statelessness in Ireland* that limited awareness of statelessness and its implications, combined with the absence of reliable, disaggregated data collection, hampers understanding of the scale of the issue and constrains effective policymaking.⁵⁵ This lack of visibility contributes to prolonged uncertainty for affected individuals and inconsistent approaches across administrative procedures.

There is currently no formal statelessness determination procedure (SDP) in Ireland. In practice, individuals who may be stateless have no clear or accessible avenue to have their status assessed, resulting in repeated administrative hurdles, lengthy delays, and difficulty accessing rights under the 1954 Convention.⁵⁶ UNHCR welcomes the Government's pledge at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023 to explore the introduction of an SDP, including through a provisional pilot mechanism, as an important step toward addressing these long-standing gaps.

The forthcoming implementation of the EU Pact presents a timely opportunity for Ireland to develop a more structured and coherent framework for identifying and addressing statelessness. The Pact emphasises the importance of identifying stateless applicants early within protection procedures, while the introduction of a statutory definition of a "stateless person" in the International Protection Bill 2026 provides a legislative basis to establish a dedicated SDP and strengthen coordination across State agencies.

Recommendations: UNHCR recommends that the Government of Ireland:

- a) Introduce a formal SDP to provide a clear mechanism for assessing statelessness and to ensure that stateless persons can access rights under the 1954 Convention.
- b) Establish an effective quantitative and qualitative data collection system and ensure statistics are systematically gathered in relation to stateless persons.
- c) Use the implementation of the EU Pact to develop clearer procedures for the identification and protection of stateless persons.

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⁵⁵ UNHCR, *Mapping Statelessness in Ireland*, https://www.unhcr.org/ie/sites/en-ie/files/2023-05/2022_Statelessness_Ireland-print%20%282%29.pdf.

⁵⁶ Ibid.