



www.welcomework.eu

Construction Sector Help Guide: Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union

Co-Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE). Neither the European Union nor FRSE can be held responsible for them.

Welcome Work Mobile App by Welcome Work Consortium is licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0 - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en)





contents

- 01** Understanding Ireland's Construction Sector
- 02** Entering the Irish Construction Labour Market
- 03** Key Construction Trades in Ireland
- 04** Recognition of Prior Learning and Skills
- 05** Safety, Rights, and Employment Standards in Irish Construction
- 06** Challenges Faced by Refugees and Practical Solutions
- 07** Support Services, Training Opportunities, and Employment Resources



Co-funded by
the European Union

Co-Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE). Neither the European Union nor FRSE can be held responsible for them.

Introduction

Ireland's construction sector is a key pillar of the national economy, employing well over 170,000 workers and playing a vital role in delivering the country's ambitious Housing for All plan, the National Development Plan, and major public infrastructure such as roads, schools, hospitals, and energy projects. It also supports residential housing, commercial buildings, retrofitting of older properties, and improvements in energy efficiency across both urban and rural areas. These activities contribute not only to economic growth but also to everyday living conditions throughout Ireland.

The sector offers a broad variety of job opportunities, from physical labour and basic on-site support to skilled and technical professions. This diversity makes construction one of the more accessible sectors for newcomers to the Irish labour market. For refugees in particular, it can provide a realistic entry route into employment. Many roles allow people to start without formal qualifications, and employers are often experienced in working with international teams, especially where labour shortages exist.

With experience, workers can develop their skills and move into more specialised roles. Ireland has a well-established apprenticeship and further-education system run by SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) that allows individuals to obtain recognised diplomas, professional certificates, and trade-specific qualifications. These credentials support access to higher wages, greater job security, and long-term career progression.

This guide is designed to support refugees, job coaches, VET providers, employers, and organisations involved in labour market integration. It explains how the construction sector in Ireland operates, what skills are required, how to enter different professions, and which training and support pathways are available. It also provides practical guidance and links to relevant services, helping newcomers and those supporting them to navigate the sector safely, confidently, and successfully.



01

Understanding Ireland's Construction Sector



Understanding Ireland's Construction Sector

Ireland's construction sector is a large and diverse industry that plays an essential role in employment and economic activity. It covers many different types of work and employs people with a wide range of skills and experience. The sector is closely connected to other parts of the economy, including transport, energy, housing, manufacturing, and public services. For refugees and other newcomers, construction is often one of the most accessible sectors due to ongoing demand for labour and the availability of entry-level roles.

1.1 Why the construction sector is important in Ireland

Construction supports Ireland's long-term development and public investment. Key areas include:

- Public infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, public transport, bridges, and tunnels
- Residential housing, including social housing and private developments
- Renovation and refurbishment of older buildings
- Energy-efficiency and environmental upgrades
- Commercial and public buildings such as offices, schools, hospitals, and sports facilities

These activities create steady demand for workers across many regions and skill levels.



Understanding Ireland's Construction Sector



1.2 Structure of the construction workforce

Ireland's construction workforce includes several clearly defined levels:

◆ 1. General labourers (general operatives)

Workers carrying out physical tasks such as site preparation, cleaning, material handling, and basic assistance. This is a common entry point for refugees.

◆ 2. Semi-skilled workers (new entrant operatives)

Workers with some experience who assist skilled trades and carry out technical tasks under supervision.

◆ 3. Skilled workers (craftspeople)

Tradespeople such as bricklayers, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, painters, and machine operators. These roles often require training or certification.

◆ 4. Technical and supervisory roles

General foremen, site managers, project managers, and health and safety officers. These roles usually require good English language skills and recognised qualifications.

Understanding Ireland's Construction Sector

1.3 The role of foreign workers and refugees

Foreign workers play an important role in the Irish construction sector. Employers rely on international labour due to:

- Labour shortages in manual trades
- An ageing workforce
- High demand for renovation and infrastructure projects

For refugees, construction offers:

- Relatively quick access to employment
- Entry-level roles with limited formal requirements
- Opportunities to gain recognised Irish qualifications
- Clear progression routes within the sector

Many construction sites include multicultural teams, and employers are increasingly familiar with supporting workers from different backgrounds.



You can dream, create, design and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it requires people to make the dream a reality.

Walt Disney



Understanding Ireland's Construction Sector

1.4 Key types of construction activities in Ireland

The sector consists of several sub-areas, each offering different types of work.



1. Residential construction

Building new flats and houses, as well as renovating older buildings. Common roles include bricklaying, concrete work, painting, plastering, roofing, tiling, insulation, flooring, and carpentry.



2. Commercial construction

Work on offices, hotels, shopping centres, warehouses, and public buildings such as schools and hospitals. Sites are usually larger and more structured, with stricter safety rules.



3. Civil engineering and infrastructure

Large projects such as roads, railways, bridges, tunnels, public transport, airports, and water systems. These roles often require specialised skills and strong safety awareness.



4. Installation and finishing

Electrical installation, plumbing, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, insulation, and interior finishing. These trades are in high demand, especially in renovation projects.



5. Landscaping and outdoor works

Parks, green spaces, outdoor paving, fencing, and landscaping for housing and public areas. These roles suit workers who prefer outdoor, physical work.

Understanding Ireland's Construction Sector

1.5 Benefits and challenges of working in construction

Benefits

- High demand for workers across Ireland
- Entry-level jobs available without formal qualifications
- Opportunities to learn practical skills on site
- Clear routes to skilled and better-paid roles
- Experience valued by employers
- Variety of work environments

Challenges

- Physically demanding work
- Exposure to weather, especially cold and heat
- Strict safety rules on many sites
- Some roles require recognised training or certificates
- Early start times and long days during busy periods

Understanding Ireland's Construction Sector

1.6 Construction as a stepping stone to long-term stability

Construction in Ireland can provide more than short-term employment. With experience and training, workers can gain recognised qualifications, move into skilled trades, and access more stable contracts. Progression is often based on practical skills, reliability, and on-the-job learning, rather than formal education alone. For many refugees, construction can be a pathway to long-term employment and economic stability.



1.7 Who this sector is suitable for

Construction may be suitable for people who:

- Prefer practical, hands-on work
- Can work well in teams
- Are comfortable with physical or outdoor tasks
- Want clear opportunities to progress
- Are willing to learn new skills and follow safety rules

It may be less suitable for people with serious physical limitations or those who strongly prefer office-based work.

02

Entering the Irish Construction Labour Market





Entering the Irish Construction Labour Market

Entering Ireland's construction sector is a realistic and achievable option for many refugees and newcomers. Construction plays an important role in the Irish economy and offers a wide range of jobs linked to housing, renovation, infrastructure, and public buildings. Employers often need additional workers and may be open to hiring people who are new to the country, especially for entry-level roles. This section explains the key legal requirements, first steps, and what newcomers can expect when starting work in Irish construction.

2.1 Legal Right to Work

Refugees and others with international protection status (Stamp 4 permission) have the legal right to work in Ireland. Asylum seekers can apply for Labour Market Access Permission (LMAP) five months after applying for international protection.

Key points:

- You must hold an Irish Residence Permit (IRP) with a stamp that allows employment (typically Stamp 4 for refugees) or a valid LMAP
- Your employer must officially declare your employment to the authorities
- You must have a Personal Public Service Number (PPS Number) and be registered with the Revenue Commissioners for tax (PAYE) and social insurance (PRSI)

Registration with PPSN and PRSI is essential, as it gives access to healthcare entitlements, workplace injury cover, and employment rights.



Entering the Irish Construction Labour Market



2.2 Initial Steps Before Starting Work

Before starting work on a construction site in Ireland, all workers must complete several mandatory steps. These steps are designed to protect workers' health and safety and to ensure that employers meet their legal responsibilities. The same rules apply to Irish workers and foreign workers, including refugees.

Safe Pass

By law, almost everyone working on an Irish construction site must hold a valid Safe Pass card. The Safe Pass is a one-day safety awareness programme run by SOLAS that covers workplace hazards, accident prevention, correct use of tools and equipment, manual handling, PPE, and emergency procedures. The card is valid for four years. The employer must allow paid time off to attend the course and is responsible for ensuring that all workers on site hold a current card.

CSCS card and task-specific training

Many specific tasks require a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card in addition to Safe Pass — for example operating telescopic handlers, scaffolding, signing, lighting and guarding, or crane operation. The CSCS card is task-specific, not person-specific, and is awarded after training with a SOLAS-approved provider. Employers also arrange fitness-for-work checks where heavy lifting, work at height, or hazardous exposure is involved.

Site induction

Each construction site provides a site-specific induction before work begins. This induction explains the site layout, safety rules, daily work organisation, and any specific risks present. Workers are also told who their supervisor is and who to contact in case of accidents, emergencies, or safety concerns. This helps newcomers understand how the site operates and work safely from the first day.





Entering the Irish Construction Labour Market

2.3 Entry Points for Newcomers

Many refugees start in entry-level roles that do not require formal qualifications or previous work experience in Ireland. These roles are widely available across the construction sector and are often the first step into employment for newcomers.

Common entry-level roles include:

- General operative or construction labourer
- Site assistant
- Renovation or refurbishment helper
- Material handling and site cleaning
- Helper to skilled trades such as bricklayers, plumbers, or electricians

These roles allow workers to gain practical, hands-on experience in real working environments. They help newcomers learn basic construction tools and tasks, build essential English-language construction vocabulary, and understand daily routines and safety practices on site. Entry-level roles also give workers the opportunity to show reliability, motivation, and willingness to learn, which can lead to progression into semi-skilled or skilled positions over time.

Entering the Irish Construction Labour Market



2.4 Skilled Roles for Workers with Experience

Refugees who already have construction experience may be able to move into skilled roles more quickly, depending on employer needs, local labour demand, and certification requirements in Ireland.

Common skilled trades in Ireland include:

- Bricklayer
- Painter and decorator
- Plumber
- Electrician
- Carpenter
- Tiler
- Construction machine operator

Employers often use trial periods or practical assessments on site to check skills and working methods. In many cases, workers can start under supervision while their abilities are assessed. Some skilled roles require recognised Irish qualifications or registration, especially for regulated tasks such as electrical work (RECI/Safe Electric), gas work (RGII), or operation of plant and lifting equipment (CSCS).



Entering the Irish Construction Labour Market

2.5 Roles Requiring Certification or Authorisation

Certain construction activities in Ireland are regulated and require formal training or authorisation for safety reasons. These include:

- Electrical installation work
- Operation of construction machinery or lifting equipment
- Work at height
- Gas or heating system installation

Workers who do not yet have these certificates can often begin as assistants and complete the required training later.

2.6 Language Considerations

English is the main working language on Irish construction sites and is essential for safety, teamwork, and daily communication. The Safe Pass test itself is conducted in English. Workers with limited English are still expected to understand safety instructions and warnings, and many sites pair newcomers with bilingual colleagues during the first weeks. Improving English helps workers follow instructions more accurately, report problems or hazards, communicate with supervisors and colleagues, and take part more confidently in the workplace. Stronger English also opens access to apprenticeships, recognised qualifications, and progression into skilled or supervisory positions.



Entering the Irish Construction Labour Market

2.7 What Employers Expect from Newcomers

Construction employers in Ireland generally expect workers to:

- Be punctual and reliable
- Follow safety rules at all times
- Listen carefully to instructions
- Work well as part of a team
- Show willingness to learn and improve

Previous experience is useful but not always necessary at entry level.

2.8 What Refugees Can Expect When Starting Out

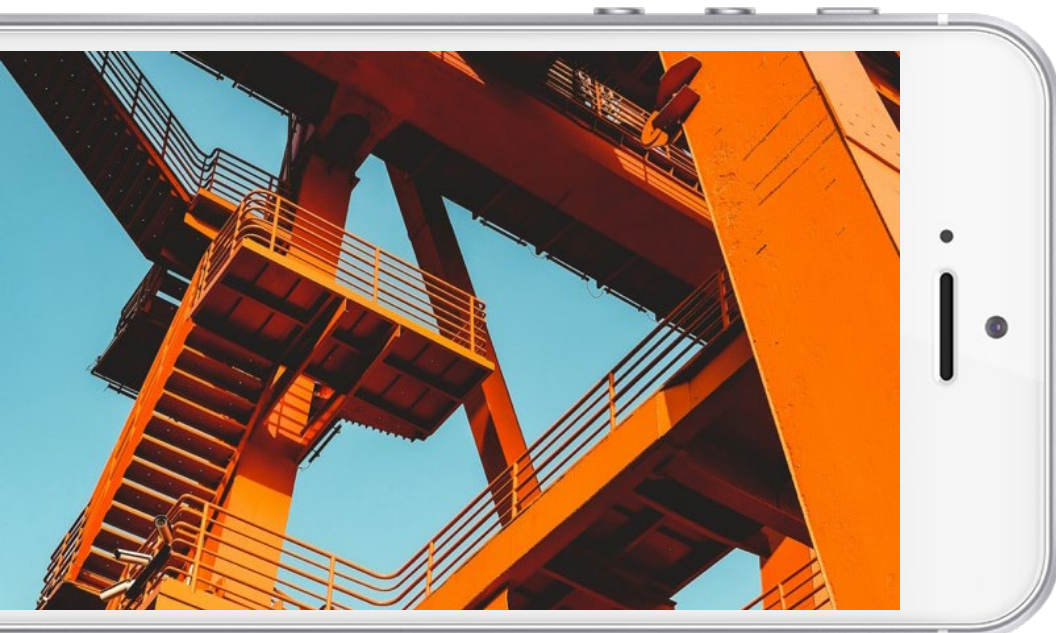
Positive aspects

- Ongoing demand for construction workers
- Multicultural teams on many sites
- Learning through hands-on, practical work
- Opportunities to progress with experience and training

Common challenges

- Physically demanding work
- Language barriers during the first months
- Understanding contracts, payslips, and working hours
- Adjusting to Irish workplace culture and expectations

Support from employers, job coaches, training providers, and support organisations is particularly important during the early stages of employment.



03

Key Construction Trades in Ireland





Key Construction Trades in Ireland



Ireland's construction sector includes many different trades, but several stand out as especially important for refugees entering the workforce. These trades offer strong employment prospects, clear training routes through the national apprenticeship system, and opportunities for long-term career development. Below are four core professions that combine high demand with accessible entry pathways.

3.1 Mason / Bricklayer

Masonry is one of the most traditional and essential professions in construction. Bricklayers build the structural elements of houses, commercial buildings, and various infrastructure projects.

What the job involves

- Constructing walls, partitions, and façades using bricks, concrete blocks, or stone
- Laying foundations and preparing surfaces
- Mixing mortar and operating basic machinery
- Reading simple construction drawings
- Working with scaffolding and tools such as trowels, levels, and cutters

Skills and qualities needed

- Physical strength and stamina
- Good hand–eye coordination
- Ability to follow instructions precisely
- Awareness of safety rules, especially at height
- Patience and attention to detail

How to enter the trade

Many refugees start as assistants and learn on the job. Training options include:

- Practical training through employers
- SOLAS-registered apprenticeship in Brick and Stonelaying (typically four years, leading to a QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft)
- Pre-apprenticeship or short bricklaying courses run by local Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) through SOLAS for experienced workers from outside the EU

Prospects

Skilled bricklayers are always in demand. Over time, workers may progress to more specialised roles, site supervision, or self-employment.

Key Construction Trades in Ireland



3.2 🎨 Painter & Decorator

Painting and decorating is a versatile trade involving both interior and exterior finishing work. It is a common entry route for refugees because it does not always require advanced qualifications to start.

What the job involves

- Surface preparation (cleaning, sanding, filling, priming)
- Applying paints, varnishes, and protective coatings
- Wallpapering and decorative finishes
- Using hand tools, rollers, brushes, and sprayers
- Working safely on ladders and basic scaffolding

Skills and qualities needed

- Strong attention to detail
- Patience and a steady hand
- Good colour awareness
- Ability to follow safety instructions
- Reliability and cleanliness in work areas

How to enter the trade

Refugees may begin as helpers, gradually taking on more responsibility. Entry routes include:

- On-site learning under experienced painters
- QQI Level 5 / 6 painting and decorating courses run by ETBs
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) through SOLAS for experienced painters
- Working-at-Heights training where required for scaffolding or external work

Prospects

Painters can progress to specialised decorative work, equipment operation (e.g., spray systems), or small independent renovation services.

Key Construction Trades in Ireland

3.3 Plumber / Sanitary Installer

Plumbers are essential across all sectors of construction, and demand for this trade continues to grow due to ongoing modernisation of heating, water, and sanitation systems.

What the job involves

Installing water supply and drainage systems
Fitting radiators, boilers, sinks, toilets, and showers
Maintaining and repairing leaks or blockages
Reading installation diagrams and technical plans
Ensuring systems meet safety and hygiene standards

Skills and qualities needed

- Practical problem-solving
- Manual dexterity
- Ability to work in confined spaces
- Focus on safety and accuracy
- Technical thinking



How to enter the trade

Some refugees start as assistants, learning during real projects. Steps towards qualification include:

- Hands-on training with employers
- SOLAS-registered Plumbing apprenticeship (four years, leading to a QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft – Plumbing)
- Registered Gas Installer (RGII) registration is required to work on natural-gas appliances
- Recognition of foreign plumbing qualifications via SOLAS' Recognition of Prior Qualifications (RPQ) service

Prospects

Plumbers often progress to heating system installation, advanced maintenance, or certification-based specialisations. Experienced plumbers can earn well and may become self-employed.

Key Construction Trades in Ireland



3.4 ⚡ Electrician

Electrical installation is one of the most regulated and respected trades in the sector. While it requires certification, refugees with experience can progress quickly.

What the job involves

- Installing wiring, sockets, lighting systems, and control panels
- Testing and repairing electrical faults
- Following technical plans and safety procedures
- Maintaining electrical systems in buildings
- Using tools such as testers, drills, cutters, and insulation equipment

Skills and qualities needed

- Logical thinking and problem-solving
- Good mathematical understanding
- Strong focus on safety and precision
- Ability to identify wiring and equipment types
- Steady, careful workmanship

How to enter the trade

To work as an electrician in Ireland, you must complete a SOLAS-approved apprenticeship and the contracting firm must be registered with Safe Electric (managed by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities). Paths include:

- Assistant roles supporting certified electricians
- SOLAS-registered Electrical apprenticeship (four years, leading to a QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft – Electrical)
- Recognition of foreign electrical qualifications via SOLAS' RPQ service
- Gaining experience through supervised practical work

Prospects

Certified electricians are in high demand in all regions. Progression routes include specialisation in automation, renewable energy systems, or electrical supervision roles.



04

Recognition of Prior Learning and Skills



4. Recognition of Prior Learning and Skills

Many refugees arrive in Ireland with construction experience gained through work, apprenticeships, or informal training, but without Irish certificates. Ireland has several well-established systems that allow workers to have their skills recognised, validated, or converted into official qualifications. These systems help refugees move into skilled roles, improve pay, and access stable employment.

4.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Recognition of Prior Qualifications (RPQ)

The main formal route for recognising prior skills in Ireland is **SOLAS' Recognition of Prior Qualifications (RPQ)** service. This allows workers to have foreign trade qualifications mapped against the Irish National Framework of Qualifications, even when the experience was gained outside Ireland.

How RPQ works

- The worker must usually show at least one year of relevant work experience
- Experience can be paid, unpaid, or informal
- The worker applies for a qualification linked to their trade (for example bricklaying, plumbing, or electrical installation)
- Evidence is collected, such as work descriptions, references, photos, or interviews
- An assessment panel reviews the application
- The qualification may be awarded in full or in part

Why RPQ is important in construction

- Construction qualifications are highly valued by employers
- RPQ avoids repeating training already mastered
- It leads to nationally recognised qualifications (such as a QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft)

Support with RPQ is provided by SOLAS (rpq@solas.ie), Education and Training Boards, and the Irish Refugee Council's employment programme.



Recognition of Prior Learning and Skills

4.2 Practical assessment by employers

In everyday construction practice in Ireland, many employers first assess a worker's skills directly on site. This approach is common, especially for refugees who may not yet have Irish certificates but have practical experience.

What this usually involves

- Probationary periods or trial days on a construction site
- Demonstration of practical tasks related to the trade, such as bricklaying, painting, or assisting with installations
- Safe and correct use of tools, equipment, and materials
- Ability to follow instructions from supervisors and respect site rules and safety procedures

Why this matters

- No formal documents are required at the start
- Skills are judged based on real working conditions, not paperwork
- Workers can enter employment more quickly
- Employers can identify strengths, training needs, and suitable progression paths

This practical assessment is often the first step before formal recognition of skills, entry into vocational training, or progression to a skilled role within the Irish construction sector.

Recognition of Prior Learning and Skills

4.3 Recognition of Foreign Qualifications and Documents

Some refugees arrive in Ireland with diplomas, certificates, or proof of training from their home countries. In many cases, these documents can be reviewed and used to support access to skilled work or training in the Irish construction sector.

What may be recognised

- Vocational diplomas linked to construction trades
- Trade or technical certificates
- Apprenticeship records or training attestations
- Employment references confirming relevant work experience

What the process may involve

- Official translation of documents into English
- Review and comparison with Irish qualification standards
- Partial or full recognition, depending on the level and content of the qualification
- Recommendation for additional training or assessments if required

Recognition of foreign qualifications does not always result in direct equivalence with an Irish qualification. However, it can significantly reduce the amount of training needed and help workers access skilled roles more quickly within the Irish construction sector.





Recognition of Prior Learning and Skills

4.4 Vocational Training and Upskilling Programmes

When previous experience cannot be fully recognised, refugees in Ireland can gain formal qualifications through vocational training. This is a common and well-established pathway in the Irish construction sector and allows workers to build recognised skills while improving job stability and safety.

Common construction qualifications in Ireland

- **SOLAS Craft Apprenticeship**, a four-year programme that combines employer-based training with off-the-job phases at Education and Training Boards and Technological Universities, leading to a QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft in trades such as bricklaying, plumbing, carpentry, or electrical
- **QQI Level 5 and 6 construction awards** delivered by ETBs and further-education colleges, including pre-apprenticeship programmes that prepare learners for entry into the craft trades
- **Safe Pass, CSCS, and trade-specific safety or technical certificates**, for example for electrical work, machinery operation, or work at height

Training provision and support

Training is delivered by vocational schools, adult training centres, and construction training bodies across Ireland. Courses may be full-time or part-time and often combine classroom learning with practical work. Many training programmes are funded or partly funded through Intreo (the public employment service), SOLAS, or Local Enterprise Offices, making them accessible to refugees with the right to work.

Vocational training helps refugees gain Irish-recognised qualifications, improve employability, and progress from entry-level roles into skilled positions within the construction sector.

05

Safety, Rights, and Employment Standards in Irish Construction





Safety, Rights, and Employment Standards in Irish Construction

Construction work in Ireland is regulated by strict health, safety, and employment laws — principally the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the Construction Regulations 2013, enforced by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). These rules are designed to protect all workers, including refugees and foreign workers. Understanding safety requirements, worker rights, and employment standards helps people stay safe on site, avoid exploitation, and build stable employment.

5.1 Mandatory Safety Requirements

Safety is a legal priority in the Irish construction sector due to the physical and technical risks involved. All workers must meet certain safety requirements before starting work.

Safe Pass and task-specific training

Almost everyone working on an Irish construction site must hold a valid Safe Pass card. The Safe Pass is a one-day SOLAS programme covering workplace risks, safe working practices, correct use of tools and equipment, and emergency procedures. The card is valid for four years. Many specific tasks (scaffolding, signing and lighting, telescopic-handler operation, working at height) additionally require a task-specific CSCS card.

Fitness for work and health surveillance

For roles with specific health risks — particularly work at height, heavy manual handling, or exposure to hazardous

substances — a fitness-for-work assessment may be required. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) sets workplace health requirements, and the employer is responsible for arranging any health surveillance needed under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Employers in Ireland must provide PPE free of charge. This typically includes:

- Safety helmet
- Protective gloves
- Safety footwear
- High-visibility clothing
- Safety glasses
- Hearing protection, where required

Workers are required to use PPE correctly at all times.

Site-specific induction

Before starting work, each site provides an induction explaining site rules, safety measures, hazard areas, emergency procedures, and who to contact in case of accidents or concerns.

Safety, Rights, and Employment Standards in Irish Construction

5.2 Rights and Responsibilities of Workers

Refugees working in Irish construction have the same rights and responsibilities as Irish workers.

Worker rights

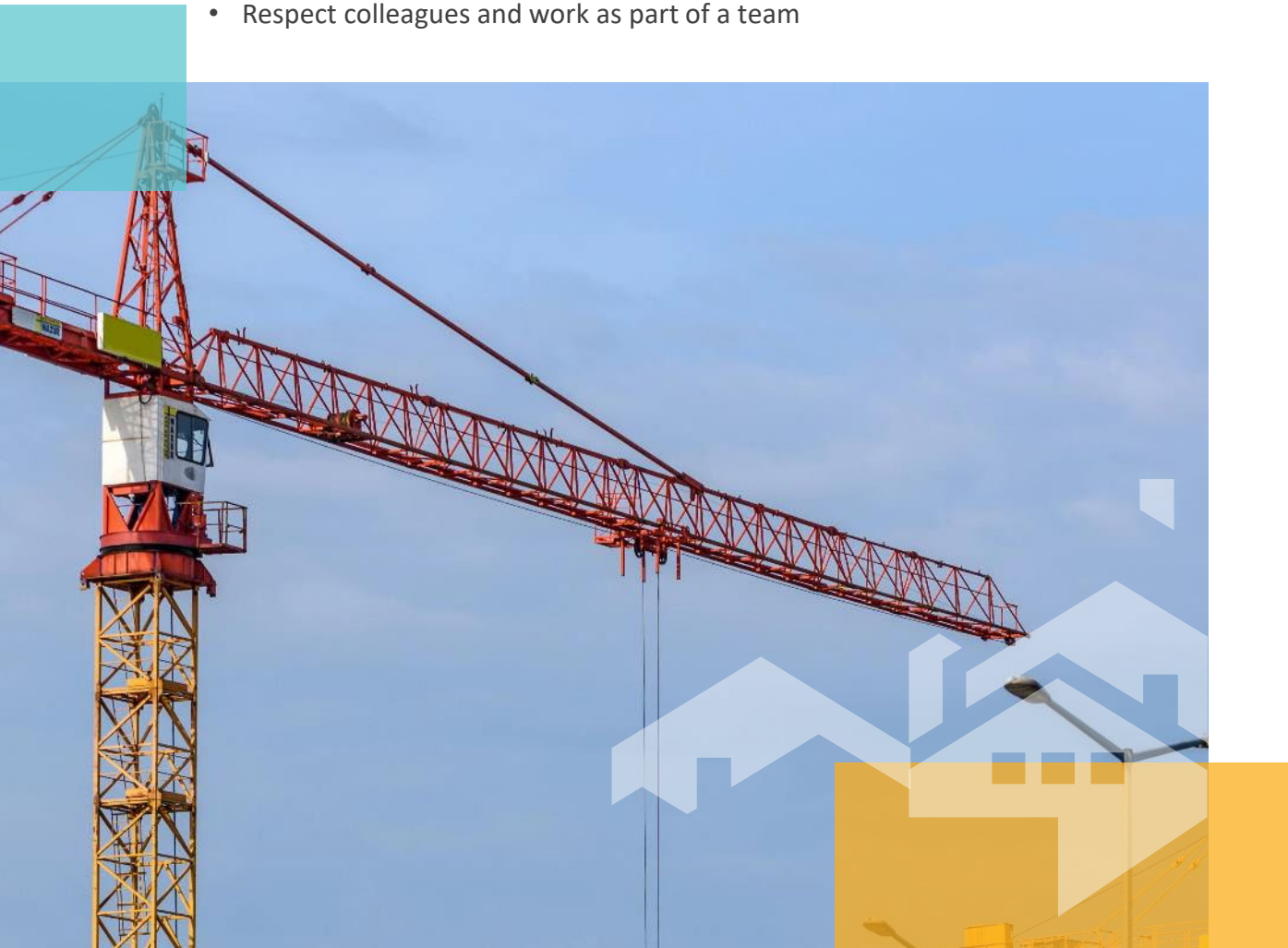
Workers have the right to:

- A safe and healthy working environment
- Health and safety training
- Free PPE
- Medical monitoring through occupational health services
- A written employment contract
- Payment of agreed wages
- Rest breaks and regulated working hours
- Paid holidays and sick leave, depending on contract type
- Stop work if there is serious and immediate danger

Worker responsibilities

Workers are expected to:

- Follow safety rules and instructions
- Use PPE properly
- Report hazards or unsafe conditions
- Follow instructions from supervisors
- Respect colleagues and work as part of a team



Safety, Rights, and Employment Standards in Irish Construction

5.3 Employment Contracts and Pay Conditions

Pay and conditions are governed by Irish employment law and the legally binding Sectoral Employment Order (Construction Sector) 2024, enforced by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

Contract Type	Description	Level of Protection	Notes
Permanent contract (full-time, open-ended)	Open-ended contract of indefinite duration; the standard form of employment	★★★★★	Best option for long-term work; full SEO protection including holidays, sick pay, and pension contributions
Fixed-term contract	Contract for a specific period, project, or task with a defined end date	★★★★	Common in construction for project work; full SEO protections during the term and protected by the Fixed-Term Workers Act
Agency work	Worker employed by a recruitment or staffing agency and placed with a construction firm	★★★	Widely used for short-term work; the Agency Workers Act 2012 entitles agency workers to the same basic pay and conditions as direct hires
SOLAS Apprenticeship	Formal four-year training contract between an apprentice, a SOLAS-approved employer, and an ETB/TU	★★★★	Paid apprentice rates set by the SEO; leads to a QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft

Safety, Rights, and Employment Standards in Irish Construction



5.4 What to Expect on an Irish Construction Site

Construction sites in Ireland range from small renovation projects in homes or public buildings to large infrastructure works involving multiple companies and teams. While the size and type of site may differ, organisation, safety rules, and work expectations are generally consistent across the sector.

Typical site structure

- Project manager / site manager, responsible for planning, scheduling, and overall coordination
- General foreman, overseeing daily work and managing teams on site
- Skilled workers carrying out technical and trade-specific tasks
- Assistants and labourers supporting construction activities
- Health and safety staff ensuring rules are followed and risks are managed

New workers usually report to the site supervisor and receive instructions through clear reporting lines.

Working conditions

- Early start times are common, particularly on large or urban sites
- Work can be physically demanding and may involve lifting, carrying, or repetitive movements
- Many roles require outdoor work in different weather conditions
- Strict safety controls are in place, including regular checks and use of protective equipment

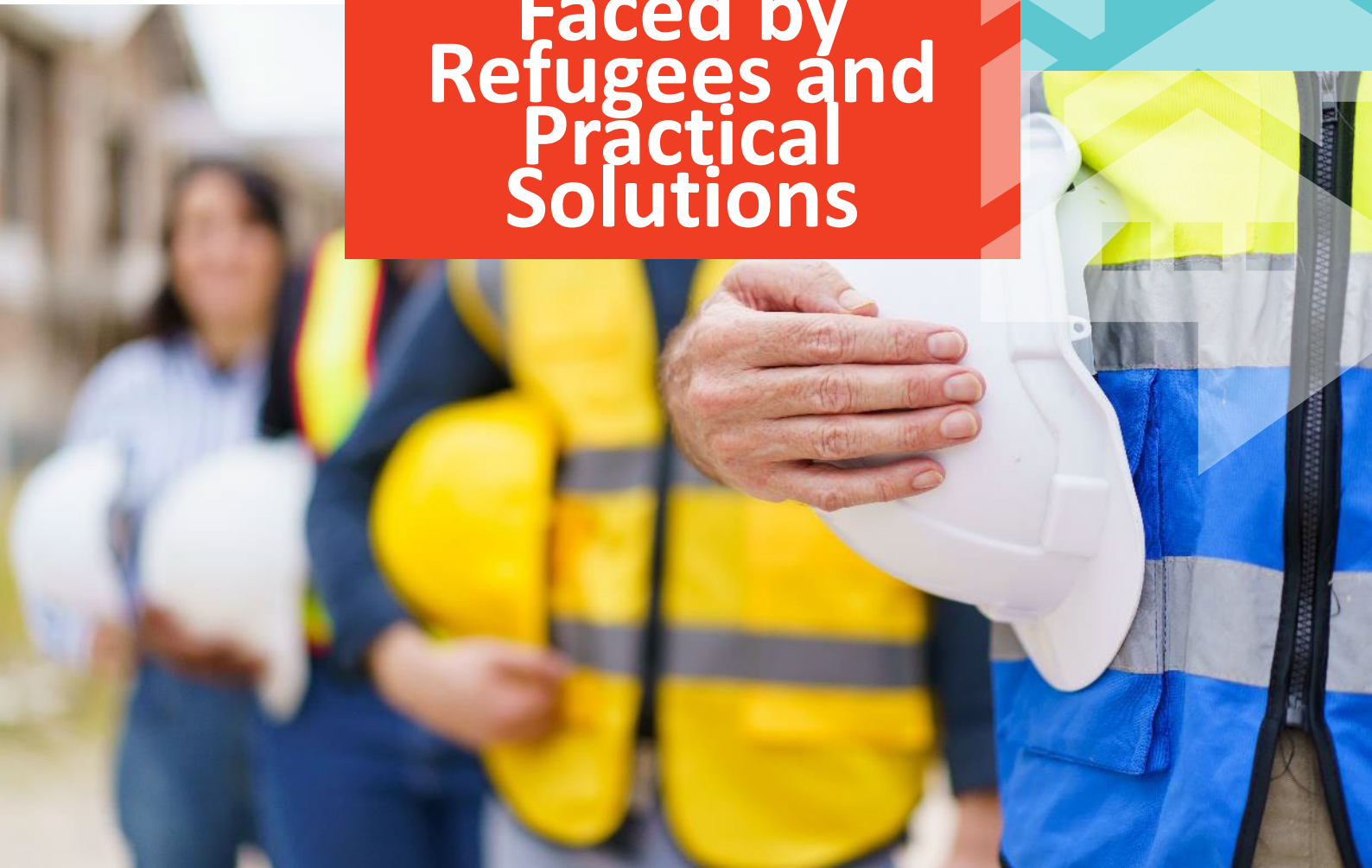
Workplace culture

- Punctuality and reliability are taken seriously
- Safety rules must be respected at all times
- Workers are expected to follow instructions from supervisors
- Teamwork and cooperation are essential, as tasks are often shared across teams

Understanding these expectations helps newcomers adapt more quickly and work safely on Irish construction sites.

06

Challenges Faced by Refugees and Practical Solutions





6. Challenges Faced by Refugees and Practical Solutions

Entering the construction sector in Ireland can provide valuable employment opportunities, but refugees often face specific barriers when starting and maintaining work. These challenges are linked to language, recognition of experience, workplace systems, and personal circumstances. This section outlines the most common challenges in Ireland and practical ways to address them.

6.1 Language Barriers and Communication Challenges

English is the main working language on Irish construction sites, particularly for safety instructions, coordination, and the Safe Pass test.

Common challenges

- Difficulty understanding safety instructions and warnings
- Limited knowledge of construction-related English vocabulary or Irish workplace expressions
- Hesitation to ask questions or report problems
- Risk of misunderstandings in busy or noisy environments

Practical solutions

- Site inductions using simple language, visual aids, and demonstrations
- Short, workplace-focused English courses covering tools, tasks, and safety terms
- Buddy systems pairing newcomers with experienced workers
- Supervisors giving clear, short instructions and checking understanding

Why this matters

Clear communication improves safety, confidence, and integration into the team.



Challenges Faced by Refugees and Practical Solutions

6.2 Lack of Documentation and Qualification Recognition

Many refugees arrive in Ireland with construction skills and work experience but without formal documents or Irish-recognised qualifications. Missing diplomas, certificates, or employment records can make it difficult to prove skills to employers and may limit access to skilled roles, even when practical experience is strong.

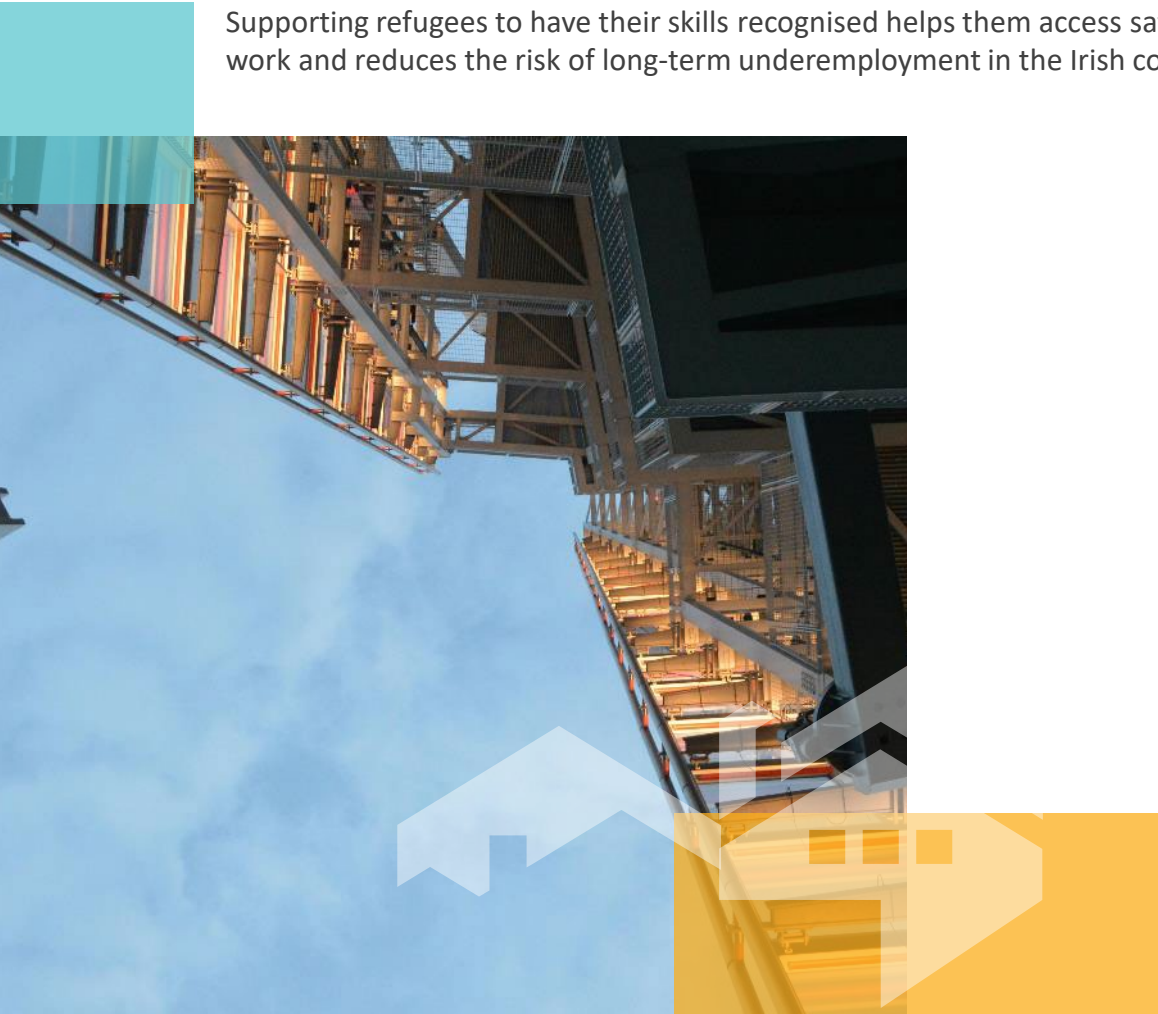
Common challenges

- Loss of diplomas, certificates, or employment records
- Difficulty proving work experience gained outside Ireland
- Limited understanding of the Irish qualification system
- Being restricted to entry-level roles despite previous skills

Practical solutions

- Practical skill assessments or trial periods on construction sites
- Use of **SOLAS Recognition of Prior Qualifications (RPQ)** to map foreign trade qualifications against Irish craft standards
- Recognition of foreign qualifications where documentation is available
- Support from training centres, employment services, or NGOs to identify suitable pathways
- Step-by-step guidance towards vocational training or professional certificates

Supporting refugees to have their skills recognised helps them access safer, better-paid work and reduces the risk of long-term underemployment in the Irish construction sector.



Challenges Faced by Refugees and Practical Solutions

6.3 Unfamiliarity with Workplace Culture, Expectations, and Rights

Many refugees entering the Irish construction sector are unfamiliar with local workplace culture, employer expectations, and their rights as workers. Differences between work practices in Ireland and those in refugees' home countries can lead to confusion, misunderstandings, or difficulties during the first weeks of employment.

Common challenges

- Limited understanding of Irish workplace norms, such as punctuality, break times, and reporting lines
- Uncertainty about who to speak to on site when problems arise
- Difficulty understanding employment contracts, payslips, and working hours
- Lack of awareness of health and safety responsibilities and worker rights
- Hesitation to raise concerns due to fear of losing work

Practical solutions

- Clear site inductions explaining roles, responsibilities, and daily routines
- Simple explanations of employment contracts, pay, and working hours
- Information sessions on workers' rights and obligations in Irish construction
- Support from supervisors, job coaches, or mentors during the first weeks
- Encouraging open communication and questions without negative consequences

Helping refugees understand workplace culture and rights improves confidence, reduces conflict, and supports safer and more stable employment in the Irish construction sector.



Challenges Faced by Refugees and Practical Solutions

6.4 Practical and Personal Challenges Affecting Employment Stability

In addition to workplace-related barriers, many refugees in Ireland face practical and personal challenges that can affect their ability to remain in stable construction employment. These challenges are often linked to housing, transport, health, and personal wellbeing, and may change over time.

Common challenges

- Unstable or temporary housing, making it difficult to maintain regular work routines
- Long or expensive journeys to construction sites, especially when sites change frequently
- Early start times that are difficult to manage with limited transport options
- Physical fatigue from demanding work combined with personal stress
- Health issues or untreated injuries affecting work capacity
- Emotional stress linked to legal status, family separation, or past experiences

Practical solutions

- Support from NGOs or local services to access more stable housing
- Car-sharing arrangements or transport advice through employers or colleagues
- Clear communication with employers about availability and constraints
- Access to occupational health services and medical support
- Flexible or adjusted tasks where possible during difficult periods
- Coordination between employment services, social workers, and support organisations

Addressing practical and personal challenges early helps improve attendance, reduces job loss, and supports long-term employment stability in the Irish construction sector.

07

Support Services, Training Opportunities, and Employment Resources





7. Support Services, Training Opportunities, and Employment Resources

Refugees entering the Irish construction sector can access a wide range of public services, training providers, and support organisations. These services help people find work, gain recognised qualifications, understand their rights, and remain in safe and stable employment. This section outlines the most relevant support available in Ireland.

7.1 Public employment services (Intreo & Jobs Ireland)

Ireland's public employment service supports jobseekers, including refugees with the right to work, through Intreo Centres run by the Department of Social Protection and the Jobs Ireland portal.

Key service

Intreo (Department of Social Protection):

<https://www.gov.ie/intreo>

Jobs Ireland (national public job board):

<https://www.jobsireland.ie>

What these services offer

- Registration as a jobseeker
- Access to construction job vacancies
- Referral to employers and temporary work agencies
- Funding for vocational training
- Career guidance and individual employment advisers
- Information on contracts, pay, and workers' rights

Registration with your local Intreo Centre is often the first step to accessing training and employment support, including the Work Placement Experience Programme and the JobsPlus scheme.

Support Services, Training Opportunities & Employment Resources

7.2 Construction training organisations

Several organisations specialise in training for the construction sector.

Key training bodies

SOLAS / Apprenticeship.ie (national apprenticeship authority and job board):

<https://www.apprenticeship.ie>

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) (regional further-education and apprenticeship providers): <https://www.etbi.ie>

What they provide

- Trade-specific vocational training
- Apprenticeships and adult training routes
- Preparation for construction qualifications
- Support for skill development and career progression



Support Services, Training Opportunities & Employment Resources



7.3 Recognition of skills and qualifications

Support is available to help refugees recognise prior learning or gain Irish qualifications.

Key bodies

- **QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland)** (national authority for qualifications): <https://www.qqi.ie>
- **SOLAS Recognition of Prior Qualifications (RPQ)** (for foreign trade qualifications — email rpq@solas.ie): <https://www.solas.ie>

Support includes

- Information on skill recognition pathways
- Guidance on RPQ applications and craft apprenticeship routes
- Advice on suitable qualifications and training routes

7.4 Vocational training and funding support

Refugees may access funded training through public or regional schemes.

Types of training support

- QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate Craft (via SOLAS apprenticeship)
- QQI Level 5 and 6 construction awards delivered by ETBs
- Safety and technical certificates
- Trade-specific upskilling courses

Funding may be available through Intreo, SOLAS, the Training Support Grant, or sectoral training programmes.



Support Services, Training Opportunities & Employment Resources

7.5 NGOs and organisations supporting refugees

Many organisations in Ireland provide employment and integration support for refugees.

Examples of support organisations

Irish Refugee Council (employment programme): <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie>

Crosscare (Refugee & Migrant Project): <https://www.crosscare.ie>

Doras and Open Doors Initiative (employment support for migrants and refugees):
<https://opendoorsinitiative.ie>

Irish Red Cross: <https://www.redcross.ie>

Support offered

- Employment guidance and job search support
- Help understanding contracts and payslips
- Legal advice related to work and residence
- Language courses
- Social and psychological support

7.6 Job search platforms and recruitment channels

Construction jobs in Ireland can be found through several channels.

Online platforms

Jobs Ireland (national public job board): <https://www.jobsireland.ie>

Indeed Ireland: <https://ie.indeed.com>

IrishJobs: <https://www.irishjobs.ie>

Other channels

Recruitment and staffing agencies, widely used in construction

Direct applications to local construction companies

Referrals through training centres and NGOs

Construction trade unions (BATU, SIPTU, Connect, UNITE) negotiate the Sectoral Employment Order and offer member support: <https://www.ictu.ie>



www.welcomeworkproject.eu

Follow our journey

