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Living and Working in Ireland

A photograph of construction workers wearing high-visibility vests and holding hard hats. The image is partially covered by a red overlay on the left and a teal overlay on the right. The word 'contents' is written in white on a teal rectangular background.

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| Living and Working in Ireland as a Refugee

Practical guide to community support, courses and everyday integration

Ireland has become an important destination for people seeking protection, particularly from Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Refugees arrive with different backgrounds, skills and experiences, and Ireland offers a combination of national services, local authority support and a strong network of NGOs, charities and community groups to help people settle. These organisations assist with language learning, employment, healthcare access, education and understanding Irish systems, while also creating opportunities to meet local people and build social networks.

At the same time, the first months in Ireland can feel complex. The asylum process can be lengthy, accommodation is often provided through the State but varies in quality and location, and many tasks require navigating unfamiliar systems such as the Public Services Card and online government platforms. English is widely spoken, but accents and everyday expressions can take time to get used to. Some rural locations also offer fewer services, which can increase feelings of isolation for newly arrived families and individuals.

This guide focuses on practical information that helps refugees settle into daily life more easily. It outlines community support centres, training opportunities, wellbeing services, housing advice and key public systems. Whether someone is living in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford or a smaller town, the aim of this guide is to provide clear pathways and trusted contacts that support long-term integration, stability and independence in Ireland.

01

Community Groups and Integration Centres



| Community Groups and Integration Centres

Ireland's support network for refugees is built through cooperation between national NGOs, local development organisations, State-run services and volunteer-led community groups. Support varies by location, especially between large cities and more rural areas, but newcomers can usually access language help, social activities, practical guidance and community events through the organisations listed below. These centres play a crucial role in helping refugees understand Irish systems, build confidence and connect with local communities.

National-level NGOs with physical centres and nationwide reach

These organisations offer structured support for asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants across Ireland.

Irish Refugee Council (IRC)

Website: <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie>

Cities: Dublin (with nationwide services)

The IRC is a key organisation supporting people through the asylum process and early integration.

What they offer

- Information and guidance on the asylum process
- Drop-in service for practical support (Dublin)
- Help accessing healthcare, education and social welfare
- Housing advice for people granted protection
- Youth services and mentoring programmes
- English classes, workshops and community events
- Referrals to legal and mental-health support when needed

Why it's useful

It provides clear, rights-focused support and practical, day-to-day guidance.

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI)

Website: <https://www.mrci.ie>

City: Dublin (national helpline)

MRCI supports migrants facing workplace issues, exploitation or difficulties understanding employment rights.

What they offer

- Advice on workers' rights and employment conditions
- Support for people in low-wage or vulnerable jobs
- English and digital skills workshops
- Community groups and leadership programmes
- Help with accessing social protection services

Good for

Refugees preparing for work or facing unfair treatment.

Nasc – The Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre

Website: <https://www.nascireland.org>

City: Cork (with national support line)

Nasc provides legal and social support for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

They offer

- Legal advice on residency, family reunification and citizenship
- Help with social welfare and access to services
- English conversation classes
- Youth and family support

- Community events and integration workshops

Crosscare (including Migrant Project)

Website: <https://www.crosscare.ie>

Cities: Dublin, Wicklow and surrounding counties

Crosscare works with vulnerable individuals and families.

What they offer

- Social support for people in Direct Provision and temporary accommodation
- Help with welfare, housing and integration challenges
- Community meals, food banks and family supports
- Youth services and mentoring
- Migration advice through the Crosscare Migrant Project

Irish Red Cross

Website: <https://www.redcross.ie>

Cities: Nationwide

The Irish Red Cross has programmes dedicated to supporting people in the asylum and protection system.

They provide

- Emergency support and basic necessities
- Community sponsorship programmes
- English conversation groups in many counties
- Refugee integration activities
- Help linking volunteers with newcomer

Local integration services and community development organisations

Many towns and counties have local organisations funded to support integration. Services vary but often include language classes, social events, information sessions and practical guidance.

Local Development Companies (LDCs)

Available across all counties

LDCs deliver integration programmes funded through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

Common services

- English classes and conversation groups
- Employment workshops and CV support
- Digital skills classes
- Women's groups and family support
- Community events and intercultural projects
- Help accessing local services and entitlements

Examples include South Dublin Partnership, Cork City Partnership, Galway City Partnership and others.

Intercultural and Community Centres

Cities and towns across Ireland host small community-led centres that welcome newcomers.

They offer

- English conversation groups

- Practical help with forms and appointments
- Social gatherings and cultural activities
- Family and youth programmes
- Local volunteering opportunities

Examples include:

- **Doras** (Limerick) – refugee support and advocacy
- **Galway Migrant Community Support**
- **Fáilte Isteach** groups (nationwide)
- **Longford Community Resources**
- **Bray Women's Refuge support groups**

Fáilte Isteach – Community-based English Conversation Groups

Website: <https://www.thirdageireland.ie/failte-isteach>

Nationwide

A national network of volunteer-led classes for adults.

What they offer

- Free English conversation classes
- Friendly, informal learning environment
- Classes held in community centres, libraries and parish halls
- Excellent for building confidence and reducing isolation

Libraries (Public Library Service)

Nationwide

Libraries play a central role in community integration.

They provide

- English classes and conversation groups
- Access to computers, printing and Wi-Fi
- Workshops on digital skills and Irish systems
- Storytime and activities for children
- Safe, welcoming spaces for studying or socialising

Faith-based and cultural organisations

Churches, mosques, temples and cultural associations offer support and community connections.

Typical activities

- English practice
- Social gatherings and community meals
- Safe spaces for women and families
- Support for people feeling isolated
- Help with clothes, food or school supplies

02

Courses and Training Options for Refugees in Ireland



| Courses and Training Options for Refugees in Ireland

Refugees in Ireland can access a wide range of free or subsidised courses designed to support English-language learning, digital literacy, vocational skills and preparation for employment. Training is delivered by national NGOs, local development companies, community centres, adult-education providers and State-funded programmes such as ETBs (Education and Training Boards). Many options are flexible, beginner-friendly and tailored to people settling into Irish life.

This section outlines practical and accessible routes for refugees to gain new skills and increase their chances of employment.

English-language courses (free or low-cost)

English is essential for daily life, employment and accessing Irish public services. Refugees can take part in formal and informal classes across the country.

1. ETB Adult Education Centres (Education and Training Boards)

Website: www.etbi.ie

Nationwide

ETBs provide formal English-language education (ESOL) for adults.

What they offer

- Beginner to advanced English classes
- Literacy classes for adults with limited schooling
- Exam preparation (IELTS or Cambridge, in some centres)
- English for work and practical everyday communication
- Part-time, flexible timetables, often during school hours

Why it's useful

ETB courses are structured, free of charge and available in all counties.

2. Fáilte Isteach – Community Conversation Classes

Website: <https://www.thirdageireland.ie/failte-isteach>

Nationwide

A nationwide network of volunteer-led English conversation groups.

They offer

- Informal conversation practice
- Friendly, welcoming classes in libraries and community centres
- Supportive groups ideal for beginners
- No cost and no paperwork to join

3. NGO-run English courses

Available through the Irish Refugee Council, Nasc, Crosscare, Doras and local development companies.

Common features

- Beginner and intermediate English
- Small groups with flexible timetables
- Conversation-based learning
- Women-only classes in some centres
- English for daily tasks (healthcare, shopping, appointments)

These are ideal for people who prefer community-based support.

4. Libraries and community centres

Many libraries organise English conversation groups and basic courses for adults.

Activities include

- Conversation circles
- Reading groups
- Cultural and social events
- Access to English-learning materials and online tools

Digital skills and employment preparation

Digital literacy is increasingly essential for job applications, social welfare systems and online appointments in Ireland.

1. Local Development Companies (SICAP programmes)

Nationwide

Through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, LDCs offer:

Courses include

- Basic computer and smartphone skills
- Using email, online forms and government services
- CV writing and job-search workshops
- Interview preparation
- Digital safety and online communication
- Guidance on accessing further training

2. ETB Skills to Advance and Skills for Work

ETBs run programmes aimed at improving employment prospects.

Support includes

- Digital skills training
- Office software (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
- Customer service and administration skills
- Workplace communication
- Short vocational courses linked to local employers

3. NGO employment preparation programmes

Organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council, MRCI and Nasc provide:

- CV and job-application support
- Interview coaching
- Employment-rights workshops
- Access to volunteering and work-experience opportunities
- Mentoring programmes for young people

These programmes are particularly helpful for people building confidence before entering the workforce.

Vocational courses (construction, care work, logistics, hospitality)

Ireland offers many training opportunities linked to sectors with high demand, including hospitality, social care, construction, transport and retail.

1. ETB Vocational Courses (Further Education and Training – FET)

Delivered through local ETBs and Training Centres.

Common courses

- Healthcare assistant
- Childcare and early-years support
- Hospitality and catering
- Retail and customer service
- Warehouse and forklift operations
- Construction skills
- Beauty and hairdressing
- Business administration
- Computer and IT support

Courses may include work placements, helping refugees gain practical experience.

2. Skillnet Ireland

Website: <https://www.skillnetireland.ie>

Skillnet provides subsidised training through industry networks.

Courses include

- IT and digital skills
- Hospitality and tourism training
- Healthcare and care work
- Food production and safety
- Retail and customer-facing roles

Some Skillnet networks prioritise newcomers or offer reduced fees.

3. Community-based vocational training

Local community centres, women's groups and LDCs often run short courses such as:

- Sewing and textiles
- Basic cooking and food hygiene
- Cleaning and facilities support
- Garden maintenance

- Customer-service basics
- Hair and beauty workshops
- Creative and craft-based skills

These courses are accessible without high levels of English.

4. Springboard+ and higher-education courses

Website: <https://www.springboardcourses.ie>

Springboard+ offers free or subsidised higher-education courses in areas such as:

- ICT and software development
- Business and management skills
- Healthcare and medical administration
- Engineering and technology

Some courses are suitable for people with previous higher education from their home countries.

Recognition and upgrading of qualifications

Refugees with professional or academic backgrounds can seek recognition of their qualifications.

1. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Website: <https://www.qqi.ie>

They offer

- Evaluation of international qualifications
- Statements of comparability
- Guidance for accessing further study or regulated professions

2. Regulated professions

Certain professions require specific licensing (e.g. healthcare, teaching, engineering).

Support includes

- Advice from Nasc and the Irish Refugee Council
- ETB career guidance
- University recognition offices for academic pathways

3. Bridging or “pathway” courses

Some colleges offer supports for refugees wishing to return to university-level study, including:

- English for academic purposes
- Foundation courses
- Access programmes for mature students
- Mentoring and career planning

03

Mental-health and Wellbeing Support



| Mental Health Support and Wellbeing

Adjusting to life in Ireland can bring many pressures, including uncertainty about the asylum process, unfamiliar systems, housing challenges, language barriers and separation from family. Ireland provides a mix of national health services, NGO-led support, community-based wellbeing activities and specialist organisations that offer emotional and psychological help. Support is available for adults, children and young people, with options ranging from professional counselling to informal community groups.

This section outlines the most accessible mental-health supports for refugees across Ireland.

Main NGOs providing mental-health support

These organisations offer free or low-cost psychological support, emotional guidance and wellbeing activities. Services are available in English, and some organisations provide interpreters or staff who speak additional languages.

Irish Refugee Council (IRC)

Website: <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie>

City: Dublin (nationwide reach)

What they offer

- One-to-one emotional support through integration workers
- Help accessing GP and mental-health services
- Support for people facing stress linked to asylum or housing
- Youth wellbeing programmes and mentoring
- Referrals to professional counselling services when needed

Why it's useful

The IRC is often the first point of contact for newcomers facing emotional strain.

Nasc – The Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre

Website: <https://www.nascireland.org>

City: Cork

They provide

- Trauma-informed emotional support
- Help navigating health appointments
- Intercultural activities reducing isolation
- Advocacy for individuals experiencing distress
- Family and youth support sessions

Doras (Limerick)

Website: <https://www.doras.org>

What they offer

- Emotional support and social counselling
- Mental-health referrals
- Women's groups, community events and family supports
- Help navigating the healthcare system

Crosscare

Website: <https://www.crosscare.ie>

Cities: Dublin and Wicklow

They offer

- Informal counselling and social support
- Assistance with stress caused by accommodation and welfare issues
- Family support and youth services
- Community cafés and safe spaces to talk

Irish Red Cross

Website: <https://www.redcross.ie>

Nationwide

They provide

- Community support programmes
- Emotional support through local volunteers
- Referral pathways for vulnerable individuals
- Social activities to reduce isolation

Mental-health support through the public health system

Refugees in Ireland have the right to access the public healthcare system (*HSE* – Health Service Executive) once they have a PPS number. Services may vary by location but follow a similar structure.

1. General Practitioners (GPs)

GPs are usually the first point of contact for mental-health concerns.

They can

- Provide initial assessment
- Prescribe medication if necessary
- Refer patients to psychological services
- Link people with community mental-health teams
- Provide medical certificates for stress or wellbeing issues

2. Primary Care Psychology (HSE)

Some areas offer free psychological support through Primary Care services.

Services include

- Short-term counselling or talking therapy
- Emotional support for anxiety, stress and low mood
- Guidance on managing everyday challenges
- Referrals to specialist teams where required

Waiting times depend on location.

3. Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs)

For people requiring more specialised care.

They provide

- Assessment and diagnosis
- Ongoing psychological support
- Psychiatric care
- Home visits in specific cases
- Crisis intervention

Access usually follows a GP referral.

4. Hospitals and emergency psychiatric care

In urgent situations, individuals can attend Accident and Emergency departments or be referred to psychiatric services.

Emergency support includes

- Immediate risk assessment
- Crisis intervention
- Short-term stabilisation
- Follow-up referrals

5. Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC)

In some cases, GPs can refer adults with mild to moderate mental-health needs for free short-term counselling.

Support for children and young people

Refugee children may face stress linked to school transitions, language challenges, past trauma or family separation. Ireland provides several forms of specialised support.

1. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Provides specialist psychiatric care for children with significant mental-health needs.

They offer

- Assessment and treatment for emotional or behavioural difficulties
- Family therapy
- Crisis support in severe cases
- Long-term treatment plans

Access is usually via a GP referral.

2. School-based support

Public schools have guidance counsellors or pastoral care staff.

What they offer

- Emotional and social support for pupils
- Help with school integration
- Anti-bullying support
- Referral to external services when needed

Many primary schools also have Home School Community Liaison officers who support families.

3. Jigsaw – Youth Mental-health Support

Website: <https://www.jigsaw.ie>

Centres across many counties

What they offer

- Free, confidential support for young people aged 12–25
- Short-term counselling
- Practical advice for managing stress, anxiety or low mood
- Workshops in schools and communities

4. Youth organisations and community groups

Groups such as Foróige, Youth Work Ireland and local projects offer:

- Safe social spaces
- Youth mentoring
- Sport, music and creative activities
- Emotional and confidence-building programmes
- Support for young people in Direct Provision

D. Crisis support and emergency assistance

Refugees experiencing severe emotional distress or immediate danger can access a range of emergency supports.

1. Emergency number: 112 / 999

For urgent medical or safety emergencies.

2. Samaritans

Website: <https://www.samaritans.org/ireland>

Phone: 116 123

Available 24/7, confidential emotional support for anyone in distress.

3. Women's Aid (domestic violence support)

Website: <https://www.womensaid.ie>

Phone: 1800 341 900

Provides help and confidential support for women experiencing domestic abuse.

4. Pieta

Website: <https://www.pieta.ie>

Phone and text services available

They offer

- Crisis support
- Counselling for suicidal thoughts or self-harm
- Walk-in centres in several locations

5. Local crisis intervention teams (HSE)

Some regions have dedicated outreach teams that respond to severe mental-health crises.

Community-based wellbeing activities

Informal community supports are an important part of improving wellbeing and reducing isolation.

1. English conversation groups and community cafés

Hosted by Fáilte Isteach, libraries, churches and local communities.

Activities include

- Social interaction
- Language practice
- Cultural events
- Coffee mornings and drop-in sessions

2. Women's groups and parent circles

Often run by NGOs, LDCs or community centres.

They offer

- Safe spaces for discussion
- Parenting workshops
- Cooking, craft or sewing groups
- Mother-and-child activities
- Peer support networks

3. Creative, arts and physical wellbeing programmes

These activities help reduce stress and promote social connection.

Examples

- Art or craft workshops
- Music sessions
- Yoga or gentle exercise classes
- Walking groups
- Gardening projects
- Community choirs or drama groups

4. Faith-based and cultural associations

Churches, mosques and cultural groups often provide:

- Informal emotional support
- Social gatherings
- Family and youth activities
- Help with practical issues
- Spaces to speak native languages and meet others with shared backgrounds

04

Housing and Everyday Practical Guidance



| Housing and Everyday Practical Guidance

Housing in Ireland can be one of the most challenging aspects of settling into daily life. The State provides accommodation to many asylum seekers and newly arrived families, but long-term housing usually involves navigating a competitive private rental market or applying for social housing. Everyday systems such as healthcare, public transport, digital services and banking also require some adjustment. This section outlines the main routes for housing support and offers practical guidance for managing daily tasks in Ireland.

Housing Support

Housing for refugees in Ireland is delivered through a combination of State-provided accommodation, NGO assistance and private rentals. Support availability varies by county, but the organisations below provide the most common and reliable forms of guidance.

1. State accommodation and support (for asylum seekers and newly recognised refugees)

Many asylum seekers live in State-provided accommodation (Direct Provision or IPAS-provided centres).

Support available includes

- On-site social workers or support staff
- Help accessing healthcare and social protection services
- Assistance with school enrolment for children
- Information on moving to independent housing after receiving protection status
- Links to community groups and local services

2. Irish Refugee Council (IRC) – Housing Support Team

Website: <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie>

City: Dublin (nationwide support)

They offer

- Help finding private rental accommodation
- Information about tenants' rights
- Support with understanding lease agreements
- Assistance applying for social housing
- Household setup support for newly housed families
- Practical guidance on bills, utilities and budgeting

3. Nasc – Housing and Integration Support (Cork)

Website: <https://www.nascireland.org>

What they provide

- Help identifying rental options
- Advice on dealing with landlords and agencies
- Support understanding tenancy rules
- Assistance applying for the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

4. Local Development Companies (LDCs)

Nationwide

Through SICAP funding, LDCs offer help with:

- Searching for rentals
- Understanding application processes
- Support with budgeting and setting up utilities
- Referrals to social and housing welfare services

5. Dublin Simon Community and Regional Homeless Services

These organisations help people at risk of homelessness or struggling with housing stability.

They offer

- Emergency accommodation referrals

- Casework support
- Help accessing housing payments
- Advocacy for vulnerable individuals and families

Searching for rentals online

Most private rentals in Ireland are advertised online.

Popular websites

- <https://www.daft.ie>
- <https://www.rent.ie>
- <https://www.myhome.ie>
- Local Facebook groups and community pages for shared rooms

Safe searching tips

- Do not send money before viewing a property
- Use reputable websites or registered letting agents
- Be cautious of very low prices for “all-inclusive” offers
- Ask for written confirmation of all agreements
- Request a receipt when paying a deposit
- Always sign a written lease

NGOs can review lease agreements to ensure they are fair and accurate.

Understanding Rental Agreements (Lease or Tenancy Agreement)

A standard Irish lease contains:

- Names and details of tenant and landlord
- Length of the tenancy
- Monthly rent and payment date
- Deposit amount (usually one month’s rent)
- Rules about utilities and waste charges
- Maintenance responsibilities
- Notice periods
- Inventory list if the property is furnished
- Registration with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB)

Important

The landlord must register the tenancy with the RTB. Tenants receive legal protections under this registration.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

Refugees with protection status may be eligible for HAP.

HAP provides

- Monthly rent support paid directly to the landlord
- A top-up amount contributed by the tenant
- Eligibility determined by income and family size

Local authorities administer HAP and can advise on the application process.

Everyday Practical Guidance

Understanding daily systems helps newcomers feel more confident and independent.

1. Healthcare

Ireland has a mixed public–private healthcare system.

How to access care

- Apply for a **PPS number** (Personal Public Service number)
- Register with a local **GP**
- Apply for a **Medical Card** or **GP Visit Card** if eligible (based on income or residency status)

Emergency services

- **112 / 999** – emergency medical and safety calls
- Hospital emergency departments (A&E) for urgent care

Language support

Some hospitals and clinics provide access to interpreting services.

2. Public Transport

Major cities have local transport networks.

Examples

- **Dublin:** Dublin Bus, Luas tram, DART trains
- **Cork:** Bus Éireann city services
- **Limerick, Galway, Waterford:** Local bus networks
- **Intercity trains:** Operated by Irish Rail (Iarnród Éireann)

Leap Card

A reusable transport card that provides discounted fares across most services.

3. Opening a Bank Account

Common banks include:

- Bank of Ireland
- AIB
- Permanent TSB
- Credit unions (community-based)

Requirements

- Passport or identity document
- PPS number
- Proof of address (an official letter, GP letter or PPS letter sometimes accepted)
- Phone number

Some banks offer basic accounts designed for people with limited documentation.

4. Mobile Phones and Internet

Major mobile providers include:

- Vodafone
- Three
- Eir
- Tesco Mobile
- Lycamobile (useful for low-cost international calls)

Prepaid SIM cards are widely available in supermarkets and convenience stores.

5. Food, Essentials and Budget Shopping

Affordable supermarkets include:

- Lidl
- Aldi
- Dunnes Stores
- Tesco
- SuperValu

For low-cost clothing, furniture and essentials:

- Charity shops (e.g. St Vincent de Paul, Oxfam, Enable Ireland)
- Facebook Marketplace
- Local swap groups
- Second-hand furniture warehouses

6. Education and Schools

Public education is free.

To enrol a child

- Contact your local school directly
- Provide identity documents and proof of address

- Some schools may request previous school records (if available)

Children learning English may receive extra language support (EAL – English as an Additional Language).

7. Everyday Administration

Important public systems include:

- **PPS number** – required for work, welfare and many services
- **MyGovID** – digital access to government services
- **Social Welfare Offices (Intreo centres)** – employment and social protection
- **Citizens Information** – guidance on rights, welfare, housing and services
- **GP registration and Medical Card application**
- **Driving licence and tax applications**, if relevant

NGOs and libraries can help with filling forms, booking appointments and understanding official letters.

Practical tips for daily life in Ireland

- Keep copies of all documents, leases and receipts
- Use Citizens Information for clear explanations of Irish systems
- Attend community events and English conversation groups to build confidence
- Ask for help early if a letter, form or bill is unclear
- Explore local libraries for free internet, printing and study spaces
- Check bus and train routes before moving to new accommodation
- If unsure about a rental contract, ask an NGO to review it first