



Advocacy and Integration: Examining the Role of NAPAR in Supporting Asylum Seekers in Ireland

Christopher Ehijie Ofanson^{1*}, Raphael Ehis Oboh², AKA Oligbese²

¹School of Management, Swansea University, United Kingdom.

²North West Ireland.

*Corresponding Author

Christopher Ehijie Ofanson

School of Management,
Swansea University, United
Kingdom.

Article History

Received: 15.07.2025

Accepted: 28.08.2025

Published: 12 .09.2025

Abstract: This study is positioned at the interface between asylum seekers' experiences in Ireland and the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR), examining the influence of national and EU policy on the lived experiences of asylum seekers. By analysing the historical development of asylum policies, the intentions and practice of NAPAR, as well as the experiences of asylum seekers, the article calls attention to the necessity of inclusive evidence-based racism prevention and integration promotion strategies. Trial Deck recommends public policy analysis, case studies, and existing literature in offering potential strategies for the implementation of a more equitable society.

Keywords: Racism, Advocacy, NAPAR, Asylum Seekers, Ireland.

Cite this article:

Ofanson, C. E; Oboh, R. E; Oligbese, A., (2025). Advocacy and Integration: Examining the Role of NAPAR in Supporting Asylum Seekers in Ireland. *ISAR Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Studies*, 3(9), 15-19.

1.0 Introduction

1.0.1 Asylum Seekers in Ireland and NAPAR.

Asylum seekers are an essential part of Irish society today, those individuals who were forced to flee their homeland to escape persecution and rebuild their lives. In recent years in Ireland, there has been a significant rise in the number seeking asylum, which raises a sense of urgency and complexity in dealing with the needs of these vulnerable groups. The increase in asylum applications reflects global pressures on those seeking refuge from conflict, persecution, and human rights abuses (IRPP, 2022). You must understand the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) fits into this picture – as a framework for ensuring equity and challenging racism in the country. The NAPAR confronts systemic racism and encourages social cohesion by developing an inclusive policy that incorporates all aspects of public life as well as the reception and integration of asylum seekers. It focuses on the need to make society inclusive, in which diversity is cherished and everyone, irrespective of their background, makes a positive contribution to the life of the community. As O'Connell and O'Sullivan (2020) pointed out, the successful realisation of these plans is essential to developing environments where marginalised communities are nurtured and valued. The purpose of this article is to examine the interaction of the asylum-seeking experience in Ireland and the activities of NAPAR. Based on an analysis of the

historical context of asylum policies, NAPAR objectives and the circumstances that asylum seekers encounter, the aim of this article is to give a broad picture of what is going on. Ultimately, it is hoped that, as a result of our work, the public will become less inclined to see asylum seekers as no more than their legal status and entitled as full members of society to be treated with decency if not respect.

1.1 What Went Before: Background to Irish Asylum Policy

1.1.1 The Development of Asylum Policy Since the 1990s.

The asylum policy landscape in Ireland has changed considerably since the 1990s. The modern asylum system in Ireland originated in the 1950s and 1960s with the ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the recognition of the right to seek asylum from persecution. But it wasn't until the late 1990s, and growing numbers of asylum seekers, that the Irish state started to change how it approached asylum applicants. The turning point was inaugurated with the introduction of the Refugee Act in 1996, which introduced a systemised method to the processing of applications and also established the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC), the role of which was to determine the validity of applications (Walsh, 2017). The early 2000s saw a dramatic rise in asylum applications to Ireland, with the country processing over 10,000 claims in 2002. The influx resulted in greater restrictions on asylum policies, influenced by broader EU directives to harmonise asylum processes among



member states (López, 2014). The creation of the Nationality and Immigration Service in 2005 was another indication of a move towards a controlled, if not restrictive, asylum regime. Critics suggest that these measures sometimes prioritised immigration above humanitarian concerns in ways that silenced asylum seekers at the policy-making table (Murray, 2019).

1.1.2 The Effect of EU Law on Asylum Seekers in Ireland

Ireland has been affected by different policies of the European Union (EU) that, in many ways, have shaped the asylum regime as well. The CEAS, conceived in the early 2000s, was intended to bring a standardised approach to determining asylum applications across member states. But the rules were applied with varying degrees of consistency and difficulty for would-be participants. * The comments refer to the Dublin Regulation: a key feature of this regulation, which applies to all EU member states, is that it unfairly burdens countries, such as Ireland, that did not have a high proportion of asylum seekers in comparison to larger EU member states (Schuster, 2017). Furthermore, the Reception Conditions Directive of the EU was introduced to harmonise living conditions for asylum seekers in member states, but has not been robustly applied in Ireland. It is reported that many asylum seekers in Ireland experience poor living conditions, which hinder their integration into society (Donnelly & O'Leary, 2020). What these underline are the continued complications that ensue from striking a balance between sovereign policies and EU law to the detriment, wherever applicable, of asylum seekers.

1.1.3 The Experiences of Other Asylum Seekers as Case Studies

The history of asylum policies in Ireland can be understood more clearly when compared to the experiences of asylum-seekers in each case. Take the "Direct Provision" system, introduced in 2000 as a stopgap to accommodate asylum seekers while their applications were being considered. Questions of the long-term uncertainty and trauma, the policy is said to inflict on the people and families have been far less uncontroversial (Gordon, 2021). Direct Provision asylum seekers are generally in a state of uncertainty for long periods of time, which results in severe mental health problems and social isolation. Another such example is the experience of Nigerian asylum seekers who escaped violence and persecution only to be met with a bewildering and frequently hostile asylum procedure in Ireland. Their cases shine a light on broader problems in the asylum system, such as the waiting time to process an application and difficulty securing proper legal representation (Adediran, 2020). A case like this illustrates the importance of an understanding of the changing asylum map and the lived experience of refugees in Ireland. In conclusion, the history of asylum policy in Ireland is one of national and EU laws, attitudes and real-life experiences. It is these factors together which form the modern landscape, and they underline the need for an asylum policy that is far more empathetic and accommodating moving forward.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Although Ireland professes to be a country that is human rights- and anti-racism-oriented, asylum seekers face ongoing systemic barriers which include: repressive legal frameworks, social exclusion and negative public opinion. Despite the promising practice of NAPAR, there are difficulties in cohesively addressing

these issues and therefore inequalities continue, and there are few opportunities for asylum seekers to integrate.

1.3 Objectives of Study

The primary focus of the study is to explore advocacy and integration: the contribution of NAPAR in asylum seekers' support in Ireland. The specific objectives are:

- to trace the historical evolution of asylum policy in Ireland and the implications for those who seek asylum.
- to assess the impact of NAPAR on racism and inclusion.
- to analyse the principal difficulties encountered by asylum seekers in Ireland.
- to make policy and practice recommendations to improve the integration and well-being of asylum seekers.

1.4 Scope of Study

The research targets the asylum seekers living in Ireland from the '90s up until the present with a strong concern for their life. lived after NAPAR from 2022- till date. It includes national and EU policy context, the function of community organisations and the day-to-day experiences of asylum seekers.

1.5 Area of Study

The study is located in the Republic of Ireland and considers direct provision and community accommodation in both urban and rural contexts.

2.0 Literature Review Conceptual Framework

The research is guided by a rights-based perspective which sees asylum seekers as rights-bearers with claims to protection, dignity, and the right to participate in society. The framework is based on the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention and current anti-racism approaches.

2.1 What is the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR)?

2.1.1 Objectives and Goals of NAPAR

The National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) is a strong commitment by the Irish state to the struggle against racism and for equality for all who live in Irish society, in particular, those in vulnerable situations like people in the process of seeking asylum. NAPAR was established in 2022 with a vision for a world where everyone, regardless of race or nationality, prospers without facing discrimination. The ultimate aim of the plan is to dismantle systemic racism and create an inclusive atmosphere that acknowledges the importance of diversity. NAPAR has some specific goals, such as strengthening legal systems to resist racism; promoting anti-racist education; and creating a greater public memory of the roles of minority communities. O'Connell and O'Rourke (2021) further argue that such targets are necessary to break down the structural obstacles that impact asylum seekers and other minorities more broadly in Ireland.

2.1.2 Techniques Used in NAPAR

NAPAR uses a multi-pronged approach to accomplish its goals, which entails the combined efforts of the government, the civil society and communities. It's also important, the letter writes, to establish monitoring and evaluation systems to determine whether

anti-racist efforts are working. This is a crucial point, as it is there that accountability rests and that strategies can be adjusted on the basis of observed results (Murray, 2022). Further, NAPAR stresses the importance of wide-ranging training for public employees and police. Those participants will be given the tools they need in order to identify and fight racism, and the plan promises they will, in turn, help build a culture of respect. NAPAR also promotes that the voices, the views and the experiences of asylum seekers are taken into account in the regulation and promotion of policies and plays a vital role in ensuring that policies are developed in a participatory manner that respects the role of asylum seekers in creating and influencing it (Smith 2023).

2.1.3 The Role of Civil Society in Supporting NAPAR.

The scope of this finding illustrates the importance of community agencies for the successful delivery of NAPAR. Among the leading voices for asylum seekers are several groups which provide invaluable support, such as legal representation, language classes and integration programmes, that are so necessary if we want to help them deal with the challenges facing them in Ireland. Conversely, actors such as the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) and Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MIRC) also directly contribute to the NAPAR's objectives by increasing visibility of asylum seekers and calling for policy reform so as to address issues faced by the challenged community. Fitzgerald (2022), in a study, demonstrates the important role of community-based organisations as a mediating force between asylum seekers and the state, as well as organisations empowering people through providing an outlet for their stories and experiences. Finally, it is important to grasp NAPAR to appreciate the Irish State's interest in responding to racism and supporting asylum seekers. Through considering the aim, strategy and the role of community organisations, we begin to understand the context in which asylum seekers operate and the deep progress that has been made in creating an inclusive society.

2.1.4 Asylum Seekers in Ireland: The Issues and Obstacles for Asylum Seekers in Ireland.

In Ireland, asylum seekers face a multitude of obstacles in their efforts to integrate into life and society. These obstacles can be broken down into social and economic obstacles, legal complications in the asylum process, and stigmatisation in the media.

2.1.5 Social and Economic Integration Barriers

One of the major struggles faced by asylum seekers is that of social and economic obstacles, which prevent them from becoming valuable members of Irish society. Many among the asylum seekers live in direct provision centres, which offer them rudimentary accommodation and meals, but often little chance of integration into the surrounding community. The experience of living in such a space, they go on to explain, can isolate refugees and contribute to mental health problems, which augment feelings of alienation (Irish Refugee Council, 2020). Problems with labour market entry and education are common among asylum seekers due to limitations on their right to work and poor language skills, respectively (McMahon, 2021). The restriction on employment also curtails their economic independence and leads them to disconnect from the host society.

2.1.6 The Asylum Process and Legal Challenges

The legal terrain for asylum seekers in Ireland is riddled with complexities that extend their period of insecurity and stress. The asylum adjudication process is complex and is often months or even years long to determine whether an applicant will receive asylum (Baker & O'Brien, 2022). This lengthy process makes them live in limbo, and asylum seekers continue in this fast lane for ages to come. Additionally, the new system of asylum processes in Ireland under the International Protection Act 2015 increases access to justice (Doyle, 2021). Chilling bureaucracy and a fear of rejection is bad for asylum seekers' mental health. Too many hoops375The terror of making an error375Navigating a bureaucratic system as an asylum seeker, in a high-pressure situation where your life may depend on the ability to understand and follow the rules, can also wear down mental health.

2.1.7 Public Opinion and Media Coverage of Asylum Seekers

Media depictions of asylum seekers in Ireland are likely to influence public perception and may have a disproportionately negative impact. Research has shown that sensationalist media reporting can increase xenophobia and perpetuate stereotypes which imply that asylum seekers are a burden on society or a safety risk (Higgins, 2020). This can then stigmatise society, adding to the seclusion of asylum seekers and developing a hostile environment. A more balanced and humanising image of asylum seekers in the media is clearly necessary, given that public opinion can affect policy and community support (O'Sullivan, 2023). To sum up, the barriers to asylum-seeker men in Ireland are social, legal and perceived obstacles. Rising to these challenges needs sustained action from policymakers, community groups and the public to create an atmosphere of understanding and support for those in search of refuge. By recognising and overcoming these barriers, we can work towards a society that includes all of us and respects the dignity and basic human rights of everyone, particularly the least among us.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 A common type of Racism that attracted backlash:

Critical Race Theory (CRT) What it is: CRT is an academic and legal theory that looks at how race and racism are baked into laws, policies, and systems. CRT, which originated in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, rejects the notion that racism is a matter of individual bias or character. Instead, it posits that racism is systemic and institutional, and that it profoundly shapes the experiences and opportunities of people of colour. Key points about CRT include:

- **Systemic Racism:** CRT holds that racism is not simply the product of individual actions but is embedded in legal systems, policies and societal structures.
- **Interest Convergence:** The theory contends that racial minorities only make substantial progress in society when it benefits the dominant group.
- **Social Construction of Race:** CRT posits that race is a socially constructed, rather than biological, reality, and that society ascribes meaning and value to racial categories.

- **Experiential Knowledge:** CRT considers the experiential knowledge of people of colour as central to the understanding and the eradication of racial injustice.

2.3 Empirical Framework

The empirical framework is based on qualitative case studies, policy analysis and recent surveys in organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council and academic researchers. Through these, the lived experiences of asylum seekers and the impact of antiracism projects are considered. The four pillars are the foundational framework for the areas of life where action must be taken to achieve racial equality.

2.3.1 Strategic Objective of Four Pillars and What it Means for Achieving Equality

- **Visibility and Recognition:** Equality can only happen once inequality is **visible**. This pillar seeks to render visible racial inequality and the experience of racism through data collection, research and public acknowledgement. You can't repair what you don't see and have not been measuring.
- **Capacity and Participation:** Equality is achieved through empowered communities. This pillar is about strengthening the power of racialised communities by building their organisational capacity, leadership, and participation in decisions that affect their lives.
- **Protection and Accountability:** Equality includes freedom from harm and impunity. That's the paragraph on "Hate Crime and Violence" that has readers hopping mad, along with complaints that some language in the Democratic platform (and its section on criminal justice reform) centres more on the public getting along with police. This pillar is about reinforcing legal protection (e.g., hate crime laws), making sure there's accountability for racist acts, and instilling trust in public institutions (e.g., the police and the justice system) to protect all of us equally.
- **Structural Change and Belonging:** Equality means not running up against systemic walls. This is the end of the end: to fix institutions (for housing, health, education, jobs) so that inherent prejudices (over race and class) are washed away, and it doesn't matter who you are, you have the same chance of flourishing and simply being happy.

2.3.2 The Five Strategic Objectives

The five strategic objectives are the high-level outcomes that NAPAR aspires to realise through its four building blocks, reflecting the desired results of the plan.

2.3.3 Strategic Objective of Five Pillars and How it Drives Equality

- **Mainstream Anti-Racism:** Embed a focus on racial equality into the development and assessment of all government policy. That way, the fight against racism isn't a matter of issuing a separate report that people put aside, but an integral aspect of each field, from health to housing, so that more equitable results are ultimately achieved.
- **Strengthen Laws & Accountability:** To equip Canadians with a strong legal mechanism to combat racism and ensure it

is used effectively. This leads to a safer society where everyone is equal under the law.

- **Enable Inclusion & Belonging:** To make a healthy, functioning society where difference is celebrated and everyone feels like they belong. This helps us feel at one with other humans, which is the basis for social equality.
- **Develop Research & Data:** To generate sound evidence based on racism and racial inequality. Having timely and reliable data is critical if you want to identify problems and hold institutions to account for results, and if you want to ensure that solutions are effective and targeted to what works.
- **Partner & Work Together:** To partner directly with Communities of colour impacted by racism. That way, policy is grounded in lived experience and more likely to be effective and just.

2.3.4 Summary of Pillars and Objectives for Equality

- The Four Pillars respond to the question: What should be our work? (Visibility, Capacity, Protection, Structural Change).
- The Five Strategic Objectives address the question: What goals do we want to accomplish at a high level? (Mainstream/stronger laws/Inclusion/data/collaboration).

They are all part of a broader series of interventions aimed at creating a more equal, racism-free Ireland.

3.0 Descriptive Methodology

This study uses qualitative multi-method designs to explore how asylum seekers' experiences in Ireland intersect with the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR). It is mainly based on three key methods: policy analysis, case study investigation and literature review.

- **Public Policy Analysis:** The study will start with a scrutiny of national and EU asylum policies, with a particular emphasis on the legislative evolution that has taken place since the 1990s till today. While major policy texts, including the Refugee Act 1996, the International Protection Act 2015, and NAPAR are consistently examined throughout, the development and intentions of these texts and how they translate to the daily reality of asylum is traced. The analysis also discusses the impact of EU directives, such as Common European Asylum System and Dublin Regulation within Ireland's asylum regime. This policy overview is grounded in wider anti-racism and integration efforts, and identifies the gaps and possibilities for reform.
- **Case Study Approach:** While being anchored to the materiality is real experience, the policy analysis is weaved with haikus and qualitative case studies of asylum seekers in Ireland. These cases are chosen to represent diversity on backgrounds and experiences, including people living in Direct Provision centres and with community-based accommodation. Based on interviews, published testimonies and reports by advocacy organizations, such as the Irish Refugee Council, the case studies presented in the book. Attention is focused on the mental, social and legal difficulties confronting asylum seekers, including their experiences with support and community groups.

- **Literature Review:** Existing academic and grey literature is critically examined in order to place the research in ongoing discussions on racism, advocacy and integration. The literature review is informed by a rights-based conceptualisation drawn from the 1951 Refugee Convention and current anti-racism scholarship. Adopting Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the main theoretical framework, the study is able to connect the effects of systemic racism within legal and policy frameworks, and privilege the experiential knowledge of asylum seekers.
- **Empirical Framework:** The empirical data is drawn from qualitative interviews, policy documents, and recent studies carried out by organisations such as the Irish Refugee Council. We use the method of thematic analysis to highlight emerging trends and difficulties in the integration processes and appraise how well NAPAR's approaches to integration are working. The role of community organizations in protecting asylum seekers and advancing anti-racism aims is also addressed in the analysis.
- **Ethical Considerations:** The study follows a stringent ethical framework that ensures that all voluntaries participated on her/his free will, giving her/his approval in writing and finally that there is no risk for the person who are invited to be the volunteer. All PSR providers will aim to collect and report data in a manner that respects the dignity and human rights of the persons they serve.

Summary: By combining policy analysis, case studies, and literature review, this method raises a comprehensive view on the hurdles encountered by asylum seekers in Ireland and how NAPAR may contribute to the promotion of equal and inclusive society. The method is intended to produce evidence-, policy-based recommendations, ultimately contributing to social justice and integration.

4.0 Conclusion:

Asylum situation in Ireland reflects the tangled web of historical policies, legal system and social ethos. The developments of asylum policies since the early 1990s, under the influence of EU standards, have modelled the experiences of refugees. Although some progress has been made (e.g. NAPAR), asylum-seekers continue to experience many obstacles, such as social and economic integration barriers, legal obstacles in the asylum process and stereotypes in the public opinion fostered by the media. For Ireland to become a more inclusive society, enabling the integration of asylum seekers should be a priority. Policy recommendations for improvement include speeding up asylum processing to cut waiting times and reduce uncertainty, improving work and education opportunities for asylum seekers, and ensuring they have access to support services tailored to their specific needs. Furthermore, the Government must undertake outreach that is proactive, countering misinformation and prejudice about asylum seekers and creating a more welcoming environment. The input from the community and the public is very important in this effort. Bottom-up initiatives and local communities are indispensable to the support of asylum seeker rights and material support.

Encouraging cultural exchange and understanding is one of the best ways that communities can break down the barriers asylum seekers face when trying to build a safe and fulfilling life in Ireland.

In summary, the next steps for asylum seekers are to work together with the policy makers, community resource organisations and Irish Society. If the Irish embrace diversity and uphold what NAPAR is about, they will have an opportunity to provide a beacon of light for the refugees who will bring with them a positive social capital to enrich the country. We must ally ourselves with asylum seekers to make their voices heard and their rights respected as we work toward a fairer and more inclusive society.

References

- Baker, T., & O'Brien, C. (2022). *Navigating the Asylum Process: A Guide for Refugees in Ireland*. *Journal of Migration Studies*, 34(2), 145-162.
- Doyle, R. (2021). *The Impact of the International Protection Act on Asylum Seekers in Ireland*. *Irish Law Review*, 28(1), 56-78.
- Fitzgerald, L. (2022). *Community Organizations and Their Role in Supporting Asylum Seekers in Ireland*. *Irish Society Review*, 15(2), 78-91.
- Gordon, M. (2021). *The Psychological Effects of Direct Provision on Asylum Seekers in Ireland*. *Journal of Mental Health and Well-being*, 10(1), 45-58.
- Higgins, M. (2020). *Media Narratives and Public Perception of Asylum Seekers: A Critical Analysis*. *Media Studies Journal*, 12(3), 220-236.
- Irish Refugee Council. (2020). *Living in Limbo: The Experiences of Asylum Seekers in Direct Provision in Ireland*. Retrieved from [Irish Refugee Council](https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.org/).
- López, J. (2014). *The Influence of EU Directives on Irish Asylum Policy*. *Irish Journal of Public Policy*, 18(3), 215-230.
- McMahon, L. (2021). *Barriers to Employment for Asylum Seekers in Ireland: A Qualitative Study*. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 15(4), 33-49.
- Murray, J. (2019). *Critiques of Ireland's Asylum Policy: Balancing Immigration Control and Humanitarian Needs*. *Irish Political Studies*, 34(2), 150-168.
- O'Connell, A., & O'Sullivan, J. (2020). *Creating Inclusive Communities: The Role of Policy in Supporting Marginalized Groups*. *Journal of Community Development*, 22(1), 10-25.
- O'Sullivan, J. (2023). *Changing the Narrative: The Role of Media in Shaping Public Attitudes Towards Asylum Seekers in Ireland*. *Journal of Communication Research*, 19(1), 87-104.
- Schuster, L. (2017). *The Dublin Regulation and Its Impact on Asylum Seekers in Europe*. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 19(2), 100-118.