

**Opening Statement by Carol Baxter to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children,  
Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth**

Cathaoirleach, Committee Members,

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the Committee today. I will brief the Committee on the work being undertaken by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to accommodate international protection applicants.

The State has a legal and moral obligation to assess the claims of those who seek refuge and to provide accommodation and supports in line with the Recast Reception Conditions Directive (Statutory Instrument 230 of 2018). The Department of Justice has briefed you on the latest arrivals figures for international protection applicants and the work that it undertakes in relation to processing of claims.

Accommodation for international protection applicants is provided by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, having been procured by the Department's International Protection Procurement Service (IPPS). As of 21 May, there are over 20,648 people accommodated in the IPAS system, compared with 11,000 people at this time last year. This constitutes an unprecedented level of demand for IPAS accommodation.

The International Protection Procurement Service (IPPS) has sought to respond to this level of demand in a number of ways. It has issued a request for tender and expressions of interest nationally for suitable accommodation. It has negotiated directly with hotels. It has procured accommodation in repurposed office accommodation and arenas. It has also worked with arts and sports organisations to use accommodation provided by them for temporary use such as the Sports Ireland Campus at Abbotstown, Croke Park and Pairc Ui Chaoimh. It has also secured student accommodation for international protection applicants who will shortly begin to avail of accommodation at Maynooth University.

We are currently working on a number of projects to purchase and build centres that would be State-owned. This is starting with rapid build projects at the Athlone and Knocklisheen IPAS

centres as part of a proof of concept project being undertaken under the auspices of the Department of the Taoiseach's Accommodation Working Group.

IPPS has procured 5,880 beds for international protection applicants so far this year. It has opened 145 emergency centres since January 2022. However, over 2,500 beds have also been lost during this period as hotels, originally procured during the Covid pandemic, pivot back to tourism. A further 92 beds are scheduled to be lost by 10 June. While the scale of bed loss has been high, IPPS has also successfully negotiated with a series of hotel owners who had originally intended to end contracts for international protection accommodation, to extend their contracts with us.

Every week, IPPS brings new accommodation onstream for international protection applicants and will continue to do so throughout 2023. However, in spite of its intensive efforts, demand for accommodation has outstripped available capacity over the past 18 months. In response, IPPS has installed tented accommodation for periods at the State-owned accommodation centres at Knocklisheen, Athlone and Johnson's Marina. 102 persons are currently accommodated in tents at the Knocklisheen accommodation centre and there will shortly be tented capacity at Mullingar Barracks for 128 people as part of the combined project to accommodate both international protection applicants and beneficiaries of temporary protection there.

The Citywest Transit Hub, originally developed as a processing centre for beneficiaries of temporary protection, has also been used for much of the past year as an overflow space where international protection applicants can remain while waiting to move to accommodation centres. However, the Citywest Transit Hub itself had to pause entry to its temporary accommodation facility for new arrivals on 24 January because the numbers accommodated there exceeded available capacity. Numbers there have now reduced close to available capacity. As of 25 May, there were 627 adult males temporarily accommodated there in a facility which has bed capacity for 600 persons.

Since Citywest paused entry to its temporary accommodation facility for new arrivals, IPAS has prioritised the provision of accommodation to children and their families. Accommodation has been provided for all children and their families throughout this period. As of 24 May, all

adult females and couples seeking accommodation since January have also been accommodated.

However, it has not been possible to provide accommodation for a number of adult males at the time of request for accommodation. As of 24 May, 217 adult males remained unaccommodated, with retrospective offers of accommodation having been made to 1061 persons. Accommodation is currently being offered to persons who requested accommodation on or before 2 May. IPAS has reached agreements with Mendicity, Merchant's Quay Ireland, the Capuchin Day Centre and Safetynet for their services to be extended to unaccommodated international protection applicants and has coordinated with Crosscare, De Paul and the Irish Refugee Council to ensure that unaccommodated persons have access to information on services and entitlements.

While there are a series of accommodation projects currently in preparation which will result in accommodation for 1,200 persons, it is anticipated that accommodation capacity will remain constrained into the future as it takes time to bring new projects onstream, particularly where they involve the repurposing of buildings and facilities as is now the case for most new projects. Contractor decisions and community response are key factors in determining the volume of accommodation that we can secure and the pace at which it can be made available to accommodate international protection applicants.

In conclusion, notwithstanding the current challenges, we will continue to work intensively to respond as quickly as possible to the accommodation needs of international protection applicants.

Thank you Chair and Members for your attention and I will be pleased to respond to your questions.