UNHCR to train IPAS staff on mental health and trauma-informed practices

Ireland's International Protection system has seen a sharp rise in asylum applications, from an annual average of 3,200 (2017-2021) to over 18,000 in 2024. While accommodation capacity has expanded rapidly, a critical gap has emerged in the provision of mental health and trauma-informed training for IPAS officials, and for staff in privately operated centres.

The project “Supportive Spaces” addresses this gap by developing a comprehensive training programme grounded in international best practices and shaped by input from accommodation centre residents, staff, and other stakeholders. This initiative aligns with key policy commitments, including the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision (2021), the Comprehensive Accommodation Strategy (2024), the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, the recast Reception Conditions Directive (June 2026), and the EUAA guidance on Mental Health and Wellbeing (November 2024).

UNHCR will train civil servants in the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) and staff in accommodation centres how to best support the wellbeing of residents. Officials and private sector staff will be supported to create positive environments for Ireland’s international protection applicants by applying mental health and trauma-informed practice in their daily work.

The tailored mental health and trauma-informed training curriculum drawing from:

- Consultations with IPAS civil servants, staff and residents in accommodation centres, health service providers, NGOs, academic experts and others;
- A review of existing training programmes; and
- A targeted literature review.

UNHCR will:

- Conduct a training of trainers programme for the IPAS led training team (25 members approx.);
- Co-facilitate training of IPAS frontline staff;
- Pilot the training in a select number of accommodation centres;

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- Equip the training team to deliver the training across all 320+ accommodation centres in the 12 months following the conclusion of the project.

Targeted Results:

- The impact of adversity and related distress is recognised and understood by all IPAS staff and private service providers.
- Burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and related mental health issues among staff are recognised and addressed.
- IPAS and private service provider staff are better prepared and supported when working with applicants, including those with mental health needs related to psychological trauma.
- IPAS residents, including those with mental health needs related to psychological trauma are better supported by staff.
- IPAS residents, including those with mental health needs related to psychological trauma, experience less distress.

The project is funded by the European Union and implemented by UNHCR and the European Commission.

Source(s)

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (24 October, 2025), [UNHCR Supportive Spaces Project], https://www.unhcr.org/ie/news/announcements/unhcr-supportive-spaces-project

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