

Travel Assistance Programme

Effective Access to Family Reunification

UNHCR - Irish Red Cross - IOM

EMN Conference
Migrant Family Reunification Policy and Practice

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Susan McMonagle
Senior Protection Assistant

Travel Assistance programme

- What is the TA programme?
- Why does it exist?
- Brief history
- How does it function today?
- Increasing demand
- Key figures, context, timelines
- Practical challenges

What is the Travel Assistance programme?

- Operated by **UNHCR**, **Irish Red Cross** and **IOM**
- Applicants = refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries in Ireland
- Funds **travel of family members** granted FRU to Ireland
 - Medical checks, escorts for medical cases, unaccompanied minors
- Assistance with travel documents, exit permissions
- Supported 42 family members to travel in 2011 and **109+ in 2017** (up to 158)

Why does the TA programme exist?

Purpose: effective access to FRU

- Once granted FRU, many applicants and beneficiaries cannot afford travel
 - Years spent by some applicants in the protection process
 - Without access to labour market
 - No savings
 - Sending subsistence money to family abroad
 - Beneficiaries (family) abroad are often displaced, unemployed, vulnerable

Why does the TA programme exist?

- Obtaining the FRU grant is not the end of the process
- Practical barriers to FRU remain:
 - Costs of travel
 - Visas (costs and logistics)
 - Travel documents (costs and availability)
 - Escorts for medical cases / children
 - Overland travel / difficult border crossings (IOM expertise)

Travel Assistance – a brief history

- Only programme of its kind in Ireland, operating since **2006**
- Irish Red Cross shared case info, UNHCR Resettlement Service in HQ, Geneva, funded travel
- 2012: UNHCR HQ funding stopped
- Continued on *ad hoc* basis to late 2015
- **UNHCR** (Brussels) and **Irish Red Cross** 50-50 co-funding
- **IOM** organise travel and logistics

Travel Assistance – a brief history

- Since late 2015: **partnership agreement** between UNHCR and IOM Ireland
- In cooperation with Irish Red Cross
- Programme on a more stable footing
- Although not sustainable long-term ... future funding?
- Demand increasing yearly

How does TA function?

1. Applicant (in Ireland) referral to Irish Red Cross (IRC)
 - directly from refugee / SP beneficiary / naturalized citizen
 - from UNHCR / IOM
 - from NGO

How does TA function?

2. IRC complete criteria questionnaire with applicant

- Status (protection beneficiary) & FRU grant letter
- Income details and evidence
- Beneficiary family member details:
 - Location and situation in host / home country
 - Ages / relationships
 - Travel documents
 - Vulnerabilities / medical issues

How does TA function?

3. IRC shares questionnaire with UNHCR to assess eligibility

Eligibility criteria:

- ✓ **Income** – receiving social protection payments, working minimum wage, financially supporting family members in Ireland or abroad
- ✓ **Vulnerabilities** – of applicant in Ireland or family members abroad, e.g. serious medical issues, minors, elderly, protection concerns and movement is urgent
- ✓ IRC collect **evidence** of financial situation
- ✓ **Housing** checks / referrals

How does TA function?

4. Potentially eligible? IRC request a **travel quote** from IOM Ireland
 - IOM assess case details, location etc. and request quote from relevant IOM colleagues
 - Medical screening if necessary (paid for through TA programme)
 - Escort costs for children / medical cases

How does TA function?

5. If case is eligible and **travel ready**?
- UNHCR and IRC agree to fund case (50-50 or 100%)
 - IRC confirm funding support to applicant
 - IOM arrange travel in consultation with applicant & family
 - Family arrives!

But it is rarely that simple ...

TA – Obstacles and Timelines

- **Travel readiness is key:**
 - Family have **travel documents**:
 - National passports, ICRC travel documents, UN 1951 Refugee Convention TDs, Irish TDs, Emergency TDs from host country etc.
 - **Irish entry visas** are inserted in TDs
 - TDs are sent to Ireland or embassy abroad. Agencies assist.
 - **Exit permissions** are not an obstacle
 - **Visas** for escorts are in place
 - Both sides of family are **ready** for travel

TA – Obstacles and Timelines

- Cases in progress for months
- Travel documents, visas, exit permissions, health issues = major obstacles
 - Irish entry visas: cost €60 per person, valid for 3 months
 - Exit permissions: cost up to \$1,200 (Ethiopia), time limited
 - Medical checks / escort arrangements cause delays
 - Travel routes are not simple
 - Housing – a growing concern

TA – Obstacles and Timelines

- Travel documents:
 - Major issue as **many families are displaced**
 - Few have national passports or cannot obtain them
 - UN 1951 CTDs – rarely issued / machine readable
 - International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) TDs – most commonly used

Travel Documents

- Irish Travel Document - positive change in International Protection Act 2015

Section 55

(1) Subject to subsection (2), the Minister, on application by the person concerned, shall issue a travel document to a—

- (a) qualified person, and
- (b) family member.

Travel Documents

- Irish TDs are issued to family abroad with assistance of Irish Embassies
- Cost of €80
- Countries with no embassy / consulate?
 - ICRC TD where possible
 - UN 1951 Convention TD
 - Emergency TD from host country (Ethiopia)
 - Some tricky cases (Somalia)

Travel Ready – Timelines

- Many applicants don't apply for visas and TDs if funding is not guaranteed
- Visas and TDs cost € and have limited validity (2-6 months)
- UNHCR / IRC cannot guarantee funding if family is not travel ready
- An eligible, travel ready family applies > we fund the case

Travel Ready – Timelines

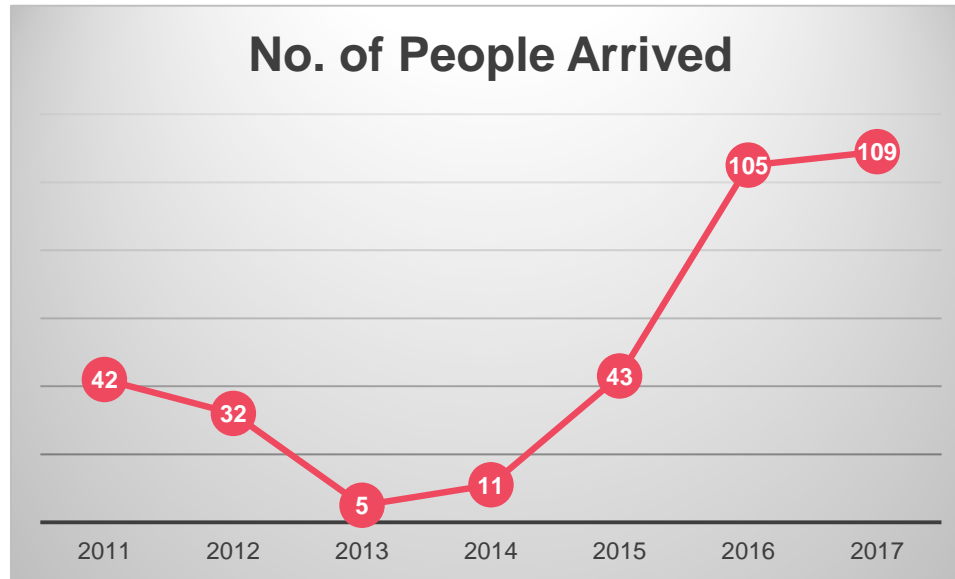
- UNHCR, IRC and IOM **coordinate very closely** on TDs, visas, exit permissions over months with colleagues abroad
- **IOM** look at travel routes – some are difficult and their **expertise** is essential
- Medical checks cause delays, family circumstances change

€\$ €Funding is Essential €\$ €

- Without funds, we cannot assist
- Applicants may take out unmanageable **loans**
- Funding is **unpredictable** – we cannot allocate to needy cases if they are not travel ready
- Not simply first come, first served
- Causes great **stress** for family members, expectation management by the Irish Red Cross
- Must consider **vulnerable / urgent** cases

TA Statistics

People assisted since 2008 = 430+ (120+ cases)



2017 TA – Syrian Beneficiaries

- 13 Syrian families (39 people)
- Travelling from:
 - Syria
 - Lebanon
 - United Arab Emirates
 - Turkey

2017 TA – Syrian Beneficiaries

- Relationship with applicant in Ireland:
 - Spouse (1)
 - Minor children (3)
 - Adult child (1)
 - Parents (14)
 - Siblings (20 – 11 minor, 9 adult)

2017 TA – Syrian Beneficiaries

- Length of separation:
 - Shortest: 1 year 5 months
 - Longest: 3 years 1 month
- FRU Grant to arrival in Ireland:
 - Shortest: 2 months (unusual)
 - Longest: 8 months

2017 – Other Beneficiaries

- 20 families (70 people)
- Nationalities:

Congolese (DRC) (21)

Somali (18)

Afghan (8)

Stateless (Kuwait) (6)

Zimbabwean (4)

Eritrean (2)

Ethiopian (2)

Nigerian (2)

South Sudanese (1)

Sudanese (2)

Ugandan (2)

Zambian (2)

2017 – Other Beneficiaries

- Travelling from:

DRC

Uganda

Afghanistan

Kenya

Mozambique

Lebanon

Zambia

Ethiopia

Somaliland

Zimbabwe

Nigeria

Sudan

Uganda

(8 displaced)

2017 – Other Beneficiaries

- Relationship with applicant in Ireland:
 - Spouse (7)
 - Minor Child (27) Includes 8 UAMs
 - Adult Child (8)
 - Parent (8)
 - Sibling (20 – 7 minor, 13 adult)

2017 – Other Beneficiaries

- Length of separation:
 - Shortest: 2 years 1 month
 - Longest: **14 years**
- FRU Grant to arrival in Ireland:
 - Shortest: 1.3 months (exceptional!)
 - Longest: **16.5** months

Time from Grant to Arrival

- Times indicated are with IOM / IRC / UNHCR / NGO assistance
- Seeing increased **anxiety** due to new time limit in 2015 Act
- Some book **independently**
 - We cannot reimburse
 - IOM assistance is necessary with some travel routes
 - Emergency TDs or ICRC TDs may be refused – problems in transit
- Self-payers are assisted too

Family Relationships

- Many dependent family members assisted
- Positive to see new FR-HAP
- Increase in applications at end 2016 to include dependent family pre-2015 Act
- Expect demand for TA to continue in 2018
- Need stable funding

Irish Red Cross – Family Tracing Cases

- 11+ tracing cases also received TA
- Some for multiple family members e.g. children followed by spouse years later
- Difficulty applying within 12 months of grant if cannot trace family members

TA Funding

- Average cost per person = €720
 - Includes cases with child / medical escorts
 - Difficult travel routes / multiple stops
 - Last minute bookings
 - IOM costs
- UNHCR and IRC traditionally split 50-50
- Impossible in recent years due to demands

TA Funding

2015

Total	€30,000
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2016

Total	€79,000
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2017

Total	€129,000
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- 2015 and 2016 costs are based on arrivals in those years
- 2017 costs are an estimate based on 158 expected arrivals before 31 December 2017

IRC and IOM Contributions

- **Irish Red Cross**
 - Criteria sheets
 - Gathering evidence and information
 - Managing expectations – very anxious applicants
 - ICRC TDs
- **IOM**
 - Quotes from field offices in complex cases
 - Expertise on travel routes, exit permissions
 - TD delivery, medical checks
 - Also managing applicant expectations

Conclusion

- Numerous obstacles to effective FRU after grant
- TA programme – direct positive impact
- Applicant feedback – would not know what to do otherwise
- Funding is essential – stability needed
- Key legal pathway for families in displacement

Thank you!