

**FROM CATASTROPHE TO MARGINALISATION:
THE EXPERIENCES OF SOMALI REFUGEES IN
IRELAND**

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1. Introduction

According to International Crisis Group, since 1991 Somalia is the archetypal failed state and one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters.¹ Indeed Samatar (2004) has used the term 'catastrophe' to refer to the destruction of the political, social and economic infrastructure in Somalia. In addition,

the rupture in the collective identity is so severe that Somalis have taken almost *any* road out of the country. Third, the numbers are so large, perhaps in the millions. Fourth, those in flight come in almost all categories – men and women, old and young, poor and not so poor, statesmen and the ordinary, educated and uneducated, urban and rural. Fifth, while longing for a better Somalia, many are so disheartened that a return in the short term is a forlorn hope. Sixth, there is a rising new generation ... whose existential self-definition is being imminently shaped by the new circumstances. Seventh, Somalis are to be found in every continent, in cities, small towns, and villages. Eighth, the vast majority was let into their new countries as refugees and asylum seekers, and, to a much lesser extent, as immigrants. Ninth, and finally, many of these dispersed Somalis carry with them trauma, venom, and guilt to an extent that enervates any attempt, thus far, at sustainable inclusive dialogue, never mind a collective effort towards reconstitution (Samatar, 2004: 10-11)

To date there has been no detailed qualitative research focusing on the settlement experiences of Somali refugees in Ireland. This report outlines the finding of a small scale study carried out with the aim of filling a significant knowledge gap and highlighting the urgent need for further research, which would enhance policy development and resettlement service provision and foster better understanding of the complex needs of refugees from Somalia. In view of the mass refugee movement caused by the ongoing Somali crisis, this study aims to examine the post-refugee conditions and needs of Somali refugees in Ireland.

The study was initiated by Suleiman Abdulahi, the co-founder of HAPA - Horn of Africa People's Aid, a migrant-led network whose aims are advocating for Somali and other Horn of Africa refugees, assisting young refugees through the Irish education system and making policy recommendations, as outlined in section 7. Therefore, our research methodology stems from collaboration between the Trinity Immigration Initiative's Migrant Network Project and HAPA. The findings arise from our interview data set against the backdrop of the Republic of Ireland's policies of refugee reception and settlement.

In order to understand the background to Somalis forced to seek asylum in the West, section 2 sets the context of Somalia and the refugee crisis. Another important background piece is a brief survey of Ireland's asylum, direct provision, integration and re-settlement policies, focusing on Somalis in Ireland, and on racism against black Africans in Ireland, discussed in section 3. Section 4 outlines our research methodology centring on open-ended interview data, and section 5 charts the journey out of war-torn Somalia. In section 6 we provide an analysis of the conditions and needs of Somali refugees in Ireland. We begin by discussing their first experiences of reaching the Republic and go on to discuss the asylum process, life in direct provision hostels and the experience of life as refugees in Ireland. Arising from our interview data, our analysis focuses on direct provision, post refugee status, employment, accommodation, education, the young generation, and family reunification. After discussing the role of HAPA, a migrant-led association catering for this refugee population (section 7), we conclude with a set of recommendations (section 8).

¹ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/147-somalia-to-move-beyond-the-failed-state.aspx>

2. The Somali refugee crisis

No one who has truly seen war would wish it or welcome it. It's not an experience I can easily retell. Even now, in my life here in Britain, far away from the experience, with years having gone by, a certain noise, a certain smell or sound which I last experienced in my home in Africa makes me jump out of my skin (Samia Nuradin Aden, quoted in Omar, 2007:93)

Somalia experienced its first refugee crisis in 1978 after the military defeat by Ethiopia. Dictator Siad Barre's military incursion to Ethiopia resulted in many ethnic Somalis fleeing the country. In 1981, an estimated 1.3 million Somali refugees were living in camps and over 20,000 thousands scattered in cities and towns (Kahin, 1997: 26). Military defeat, followed by an unsuccessful *coup d'état* marked the beginning of a political crisis that grew during the 1980s (Gundel, 2002: 257). Siad Barre, facing growing opposition to his rule, put the blame for the military defeat and the failed coup upon Somalis in Northern Somalia (especially those from the Isaq and Majerteen clans).² His regime destroyed their villages and persecuted people from these clans: human rights violations including torture, imprisonment, confiscation of property and intimidation, became common. These repressive measures led to the formation of armed opposition groups such as the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM). The evolving crisis became a full-scale war in 1988 when the SNM, mainly representing Isaq clan members from North Western Somalia, launched an offensive against government forces in Hargeisa and Burao. The government responded by bombarding and destroying these cities, killing over 50,000 people (Gundel, 2002). The destruction of these historical cities caused violent reprisals and intensified the conflict, which led to 'a dramatic increase in war victims, the traumatised and large numbers of young single mothers and children' (Griffiths, 2002: 78).

In January 1991, Siad Barre's regime was overthrown by the United Somali Congress, mainly backed by the Hawiye clan. The USC named Ali Mahdi Mohamed interim president and invited other opposition groups to join negotiations to form a new government. The SNM and other groups refused to take part in the discussion, and in May 1991 the SNM restored independent sovereignty and formed the Somaliland Republic.

The early 1990s were very turbulent as 'a volatile political landscape degenerated into chaos and the demise of civil society' (Danso, 2001: 4). The USC had been unable to organise a viable alternative to the defunct regime and Southern Somalia continued to be ravaged by civil war. The violent conflict pushed many people to flee their homes seeking refuge abroad or in neighbouring countries. It is estimated that in 1991 alone more than one million people left Somalia to seek refuge in Kenya, Ethiopia, Europe, the US, Canada and Australia (Gundel, 2002: 264).

Towards the end of 1992, the US launched Operation Restore Hope to establish a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian relief. UN forces took over and started operations to disarm Somali militias and destroy weapons. The US and UN interventions

² Somalis are ethnically quite homogeneous and share the same language and religion (98% of Somalis are Sunni Muslims). Despite this apparent homogeneity 'deep division along tribal lines splits Somali society' (Kahin, 1997: 5). There are four main clans in Somalia – Isaq, Darod, Hawiye and Dir- and many minority groups including Bantu, Bravenese, Rerhamar, Bajuni, Eyle, Galgala, Tumul, Yibir and Gaboye (ibid: 6-7). Most minorities live throughout southern Somalia, in relatively small and distinct communities. They often speak local dialects and work as artisans, fishermen and farmers, occupations deemed inferior by their pastoralist country folk (ibid). The clan system is very important in Somali society and culture, as it provides the basis for the traditional social and political structure in which power was generally decentralised and administered by elders (Lewis, 1993). Given the primacy of clan-based politics so called minority clans have been particularly affected by the violence and chaos which has engulfed the country since the civil war.

were poorly planned and provoked further civilian deaths and destruction which fuelled clan-based violence and lawlessness (Peterson, 2000). After the UN forces left Somalia the civil war 'officially' drew to a close but faction fighting and localised war continued (Menkhaus, 2007).

Successive transitional governments remained on the brink of collapse, overtaken by an Islamist insurgency that has left the country in a perpetual state of insecurity, despite Ethiopian military intervention from December 2006 until January 2009. According to Menkhaus (2003: 407), the lack in Somalia of 'even a minimal fig leaf of central administration ... puts it in a class by itself among the world's failed states'.³ In recent years the situation has deteriorated to become one of the world's worst humanitarian and security crises, with the Ethiopian military campaign, combined with US bombings of suspected militant hide-outs, setting in motion a chain of events that in mid-2008 culminated in the recapture of much of the country's south by the hard-line Islamist insurgent group, Al-Shabaab. The official number of civilians killed since December 2006 stands at 18,000.⁴ According to the Monitoring group set up by the UN Security Council in Somalia:

[T]he security situation has remained largely stagnant. The conflict remains a grim example of 'hybrid warfare': a combination of conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, as well as indiscriminate violence, coercion, and criminal disorder...Somalia's frail Transitional Federal Government has struggled ineffectually to contain a complex insurgency that conflates religious extremism, political and financial opportunism, and clan interests...As a result, southern Somalia remains a patchwork of fiefdoms controlled by rival armed groups – a political and security vacuum in which no side is strong enough to impose its will on the others (UN Security Council, 2010: 6).⁵

Media and international bodies monitoring the ongoing changes in Somalia's political and economic system speak of 'a story that is very much unfolding, and one in which today's accounts quickly become yesterday's news' (Little, 2003: 61). At present Somalia is mired in a brutal conflict between the Transitional Federal Government, which holds part of the capital Mogadishu, and armed opposition groups which control the rest of the country. Conflict continues to ravage strategically important areas, especially in the South and in Mogadishu (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Although Al-Shabaab has secured relative peace in some areas under its control, security has come at the intolerable price of 'targeted killings and assaults, repressive forms of social control, and brutal punishments under its draconian interpretation of sharia' (Human Rights Watch, 2010: 2). Harsh and repressive measures are especially affecting women and minority groups: 'freedoms women took for granted in traditional Somali culture have been dramatically rolled back. In many areas, women have been barred from engaging in any activity that leads them to mix with men – even small-scale commercial enterprises that many of them depend on for a living' (Human Rights Watch, 2010: 3). Minority clans continue to be subjected to intimidation, personal assault, looting and forced displacement from their land (UN-OCHA, 2002). Unlike clans from dominant groups, minorities lack international support in the form of regular remittances, and receive little assistance from aid agencies as insecurity affects the delivery of services. The plight of minority clan members was evidenced by one of our participants – a woman in her

³ Zetter (2007: 177) notes that the occurrence of 'failed states', on the basis of ethnic nationalism and ethnic cleansing, has been 'the major driving force behind the dramatic rise of refugees and other forcibly displaced populations in the post-Cold War era'.

⁴ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1166&l=1> (last accessed 9/3/10)

⁵ The new age of piracy in Somali, which has received extensive media coverage, must be understood in the broader context of the collapse of the centralised state, mass starvation, destruction of food supply, and illegal dumping of nuclear waste in Somali waters by western criminal organisations. According to Sadouni (2009:238): 'even if some may be mere gangsters, it is worth remembering that the illegal dumping and trawling in the Somali waters by foreign ships for many years may well have given Somali piracy a certain local form of legitimacy'.

thirties – who recalled how she was ‘taken’ by militia groups and forced ‘to volunteer’ for them:

There was a time I got problems with militias in Somalia... and they beat me... and kicked me in my leg... they did lots of things to me... I had lots of problems with them [...] we are a minority group... they would just come and take us from our houses... and take us to... where they want... they can take you and they can rape you... some kill... asking for ransom... they won't release you... I was washing for them... I was cooking for them... I was doing a lot of things for them... and one was saying 'don't kill her... just let her live... it is better that we ask her father for ransom... so that we can take the money and leave her'... they went to my father and asked for money... and my father gave them the money [Faduma] ⁶

More than 3.2 million Somalis – 40% of the population – are dependent on external assistance, and hundreds of thousands of people have fled the country to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of Somalis who are internally displaced has increased from 1.3 million in the first quarter of 2009 to 1.55 million following renewed violence in Mogadishu since May 2009.⁷ In the first three weeks of 2010, 63,000 people were displaced from their homes across southern and central Somalia (Human Rights Watch, 2010: 4). Most of the internally displaced are concentrated in the Afgooye corridor, some 30 kilometres from Mogadishu, where 524,000 Somalis are living in makeshift shelters without adequate access to basic facilities.⁸

In addition to the internally displaced, many Somali refugees live in appalling conditions in neighbouring countries. The situation in Kenya is a case in point. In 2009 a report by Oxfam⁹ warned that hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees could face a humanitarian emergency, unless urgent steps were taken to deal with a serious public health crisis unfolding in the Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya. Dadaab is one of the world's largest concentrations of refugees. Its population now stands at more than 250,000, almost three times its intended size (Abdi, 2005; Horst, 2008). The Oxfam report uncovered a serious public health crisis caused by a lack of basic services, severe overcrowding and a chronic lack of funding. Though Kenya has closed its border with Somalia, refugees continue to arrive daily and the border closure is actually exacerbating the crisis. Furthermore, the situation in Dadaab has led to increased tensions between Somali refugees and local Kenyans, particularly over rights to land, water and trees.¹⁰

According to Oxfam, the conditions in Dadaab need immediate attention, as more than half the camp's inhabitants do not have access to water, leading to serious health issues, including cholera. Reception centres on the border run by the UNHCR used to give health checks to new refugees, but due to the border closure, these centres were closed down, meaning new arrivals no longer receive health checks before reaching the camp. According to Philippa Crosland-Taylor of Oxfam Kenya, 'until there is a lasting peace in Somalia, many more people will continue to flee... An open but managed border will allow Kenya to meet its legitimate security concerns, but also allow refugees to receive the assistance to which they are entitled under international law'.

While according to the UN, the majority of Somali refugees live in countries neighbouring Somalia – Kenya (312,800), Yemen (146,000) and Ethiopia (45,000) – a considerable number have managed to reach Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the US. The number of Somalis seeking asylum in Europe has been increasing steadily

⁶ Not her real name, see note 23.

⁷ http://www.africanews.com/site/Somalias_IDP_is_over_15m/list_messages/26825

⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8235089.stm>.

⁹ <http://www.oxfam.org/pressroom/pressrelease/2009-03-27/humanitarian-crisis-imminent-somali-refugee-camp>

¹⁰ <http://www.oxfamireland.org/news/releases/2009/03-27.shtml> (last accessed 9/3/10)

since 1996: Somalia has been among the top ten countries of origin for asylum applications to the EU for 15 years (Kindiki, 2005).¹¹ According to statistics published by Eurostat (2010), in 2009 there were 261,000 asylum applicants registered in the 27 member states of the EU (EU27), among which 19,070 (7%) were from Somalia. The main destination countries of Somali asylum seekers in 2009 were the Netherlands (27.6%) followed by Sweden (27.1%) and Norway (8.7%).¹² Somalis were also the largest group of beneficiaries of protection status and counted for 17% of the total number of 78,800 asylum seekers granted protection by EU27 in 2009.¹³

According to Sadouni (2009: 243) forced migration of Somalis constitutes a 'diaspora in the making' as Somali communities have settled in the west only recently and, with the exception of Britain and possibly Italy, 'have been formed *ex nihilo*' (Pérouse de Montclos, 2003:37). Prior to Somalia's refugee crisis Somalis living in Europe were almost exclusively concentrated in the UK due to colonial links and the availability of work. These early Somali migrants were predominantly male and many worked in the Royal or Merchant Navy (Kahin, 1997: 31). A small number were highly educated professionals and businesspeople (Omar, 2007). The UK plays a unique role in relation to the Somali diaspora in Europe thanks to its colonial history, the presence of a well-established community infrastructure, and the role of family networks: for this reason secondary migration from the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Denmark to the UK is quite widespread among Somali refugees (Valentine and Sporton, 2009: 235).

¹¹ Fangen (2006:74) reports that 55% of the Somalis living in Norway arrived in the period between 2000 and 2005. There are approximately 15,000 Somalis currently residing in Denmark, one of the largest groups of immigrants (Fink-Nielsen et al., 2004: 27). Most of them arrived between the late 1980s and 1990s and have obtained refugee status and applied for and received Danish citizenship (Valentine and Sporton, 2009: 235).

¹² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/publications/collections/sif_dif/sif (last accessed 25/06/2010)

¹³ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-18062010-AP/EN/3-18062010-AP-EN.PDF (last accessed 25/06/2010)

3. Irish asylum, integration, resettlement and direct provision policies

The Republic of Ireland has a problematic history in relation to refugees. Since the mid-1990s, when Ireland reached an immigration ‘turning point’, asylum seekers have been seen not merely as ‘unnecessary’ in terms of filling labour shortages created by Ireland’s economic boom, they were also deemed both a financial burden on the state, and a group of people the state had to manage through a series of technologies of control and containment (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006). This section briefly reviews the history of refugee reception and re-settlement in Ireland with particular emphasis on asylum and direct provision policies. It outlines the problems engendered by sequestering asylum seekers in direct provision centres, a state technology which not only deprives people of basic human rights, it also, by fragmenting them through dispersal, makes political organisation near impossible. Importantly, as articulated clearly by successive ministers for integration (Lenihan, 2008; Reilly, 2010a), state integration policies are targeted only at people with secure refugee and/or residence status – leaving asylum seekers and undocumented migrants out of the integration equation. In order to further highlight the conditions of Somali asylum seekers and refugees, the section concludes by briefly surveying research on racism against African people in Ireland.

As early as the Nazi period (1933-1946), the Republic notoriously admitted only 60 Jewish refugees while Europe’s Jewish population was being annihilated by the Nazis (see e.g., Keogh, 1998; Goldstone and Lentin, 1997). Between 1956 and the 1980s, Ireland was a reluctant participant in the international refugee regime of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Though it accepted several hundred programme refugees,¹⁴ the Republic did not provide sufficient means for their short and long-term resettlement. This period saw the arrival of Hungarian refugees (1956), Chilean refugees (1973-4), Vietnamese refugees (1979) and Iranian Baha’is (1985). According to Eilish Ward (1999), most of these groups were not properly accommodated nor sufficiently provided with appropriate services, leading to many leaving Ireland, having experienced problems such as isolation, unemployment and language acquisition. In 1992 Ireland decided to allow a small group of Bosnian programme refugees fleeing the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. A long-term reception programme was put in place, but state-sponsored integration did not occur as planned, and Bosnians are reacting by ‘going home for the summer’ for a number of months each year, leading a transnational existence, and not becoming an integrated part of Irish society (Halilovic-Pastuovic, 2007).

Although asylum seekers came to Ireland in small numbers beforehand, the 1990s are considered the beginning of Ireland’s asylum regime. The number of people seeking asylum in Ireland has risen from 31 in 1991 to peak in 2002 at 11,634, and it has been declining ever since. The precise number of asylum seekers is difficult to ascertain. While the UNHCR (2010) recorded 9,730 refugees and 4,612 asylum seekers in 2009, the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) reports that of 65,611 applications received since 2000, 9,427 applicants are still awaiting recommendation. Overall, only between 4 and 10% of asylum seekers have been granted refugee status; in recent years this proportion is even lower. Statistics published by Eurostat show that Ireland has the

¹⁴ There are two categories of refugees in Ireland:

1. Programme Refugees: Persons who have been invited to Ireland on foot of a Government decision in response to humanitarian requests from international bodies such as the UNHCR. Ireland accepts 10 programme refugee resettlement cases annually, which averages between 40-50 individuals per year.
2. Convention Refugees: Persons who fulfil the requirements of the definition of a refugee under the 1951 Convention and are granted refugee status (<http://www.nccri.ie/cdsu-refugees.html>)

second lowest rate of recognition of asylum applications after Greece.¹⁵ According to ORAC (www.orac.ie), in 2009, of a total of 3,908 applications, only 97 received positive recommendations while 2,612 received negative recommendations.

The state's response to asylum and immigration policies is epitomised by the move from the paternalistic discourses of the deserving, right-bearing refugee emanating from the Department of Foreign Affairs until the early 1990s, to discourses of the undeserving, fraudulent and criminal asylum seeker as expressed by the Department of Justice since the mid-1990s, when Ireland was allegedly turning from an 'emigrant nursery' to an in-migration destination (Coghlan, 2003). This political shift explains the state's approach towards asylum seekers, described by Steven Loyal (2003: 79) as 'the poorest of the poor', their presence making 'the nadir of the putative values of the Celtic Tiger; they are marginalised, poor, and, in many respects, they lack freedom'. Furthermore, as Lisa Schuster (2003: 244) argues, European states and media demonise asylum seekers to conjure up cheat, liar, criminal, sponger – someone deserving hostility and disbelief not because of any misdemeanour but simply because they are asylum seekers. This leads to protracted decision making processes as to whether to grant asylum applicants refugee status or humanitarian leave to remain, and denotes, as Schuster claims, a 'racist asylum regime' (see also Lentin and McVeigh, 2006: 43). Issues of demonisation, discretion and protracted asylum processes are also evidenced by our participants (see section 6.1).

According to Khalid Ibrahim, who founded the Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland (ARASI) in 1997, when asylum seekers started to arrive in Ireland in the early 1990s, 'there was nothing here for refugees... no legislation to deal with people who were applying for asylum' (interview, 2008). At the time, asylum seekers were mostly concentrated in urban centres, and Ibrahim, together with a small group of asylum seekers from Somalia, Cuba, the Congo and Nigeria, established ARASI to campaign for asylum seekers' legal rights and publicise their plight. ARASI, part of a broader antiracism coalition, succeeded in bringing the issues faced by asylum seekers to the attention of an incredulous Irish public. The Irish antiracism movement has since by and large ceased to exist, apart from small pockets of resistance to racism and discriminatory state immigration policies. This is due, among other factors, to the dispersal of asylum seekers in direct provision centres throughout the country, but also to cooptation and competition from Irish-led NGOs. In 2010, despite the existence of several NGOs working with and for asylum seekers and refugees, the issues facing asylum seekers in Ireland remain largely hidden from public view.

It is important to stress that from the very beginning, the state described asylum seekers as problems, 'bogus refugees', 'economic migrants', and 'illegal immigrants', despite the fact that the 1951 Geneva Convention entitles anyone to legally seek asylum in another jurisdiction. Although those granted refugee status are candidates for Irish citizenship, as late as 2001, the agency established by the government to deal with settling asylum seekers, the Reception and Integration Agency, continued to dub them 'refugees' long after being granted status, thus perpetuating their marginalisation. Though Ireland was widely seen as enacting a liberal labour migration regime, particularly during the boom years of the 'Celtic Tiger', we suggest that in establishing a restrictive asylum and immigration regime, the Irish state continues to show disregard for the rights of asylum seekers. This is best exemplified by the response of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to a Dáil question, that asylum seekers tell 'cock and bull stories', and that he would 'prefer to interview these people at the airport, but the UN insists that I go through due process' (Holland, 2005).

In *One Size Does not Fit All*, the Free Legal Aid Centre (FLAC) (2009) outlines the establishment of direct provision asylum hostels and the discrimination faced by asylum seekers and people seeking humanitarian leave to remain in these hostels. This report was published seven years after *Direct Discrimination*, in which FLAC described the direct provision scheme as 'gravely detrimental of the human rights of a group of people legally present in the country and to whom the government has moral and legal obligations under

¹⁵ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-18062010-AP/EN/3-18062010-AP-EN.PDF

national and international law', and recommended that the scheme be 'abandoned immediately' (FLAC, 2003) – to little avail.

In 2000, in response to the shortage of housing in urban centres, primarily Dublin, in the wake of Britain opting for dispersing asylum seekers in direct provision centres, and after a pilot scheme in November 1999, Ireland introduced a direct provision scheme whereby asylum seekers are provided with accommodation on a full board basis. Prior to this, asylum seekers were housed by Health Boards, and could avail of Supplementary Welfare Allowances, abolished, like all other welfare benefits to asylum seekers, in December 2009. FLAC points out that the policy of direct provision was introduced as an administrative, rather than legislative measure, becoming policy in April 2000. In addition to full board, asylum seekers received a 'residual income maintenance payment to cover personal requisites' of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child per week – not increased since 2001. The government established the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) to coordinate the provision of services to asylum seekers and refugees, as a unit of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), set up in 2005 as a 'one-stop-shop' to deal with all matters of immigration, asylum, citizenship and visas by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

By December 2000, 62 direct provision centres were operating, increasing to 84 centres consisting of 9 reception centres and 75 accommodation centres. The centres include guesthouses, hotels, hostels, mobile homes and Mosney, a former Co Meath holiday camp. While waiting for a decision, at times up to seven years, asylum seekers are not permitted to take up waged work (or access full time third level education, or VEC courses above FETAC level 4). FLAC (2009:1.6) argues that by entering into contractual arrangements with private profit-making companies to provide accommodation and meals to asylum seekers, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has created a 'direct provision industry', which makes a profit on the backs of asylum seekers, costing the Irish tax payers €70,892 per resident per annum in 2009 (FLAC, 2009:1.5). Though the DJELR does not publish the amount of money it pays each contractor operating the direct provision centres, Mosney Irish Holidays Ltd made revenues worth €9.2 million from accommodating asylum seekers in 2008 – the last year for which it has filed accounts.

Demonstrating the decision making process relating to housing asylum seekers, in July 2010 some 150 asylum-seekers living in Mosney were told by the Department of Justice to move to different hostels across the country, a decision seen as arbitrary by the residents involved (Smyth, 2010a). The decision was taken as a money saving exercise.

FLAC argues that there is a direct contrast between the decrease in the number of people entering the state to seek asylum and the increase in the number of people living in direct provision – some 6,482 at the end of 2009. In October 2009, 32% of the residents had lived in direct provision more than three years (www.ria.ie), even though the government had initially intended for asylum seekers to only stay in direct provision centres up to six months (FLAC, 2009, Executive Summary). FLAC concludes that the management of the centres is less than transparent: the requisite number of inspections is not carried out and RIA does not operate a systematic record of complaints.

The introduction of the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) in May 2004 means that people applying for social assistance benefits or Child Allowance have to prove they are habitually resident in the state, and asylum seekers in direct provision were excluded from all benefits as result of this policy (AkiDwA, 2010). According to FLAC this was a misapplication of the law. Furthermore, although residents in direct provision centres are disadvantaged through the prohibition on working and the small allowance payable, they are not included in anti-poverty measures or statistics.

The direct provision system is not an environment conducive to the enjoyment of most basic human rights, including the rights to health, food (in most hostels residents are not allowed to cook their own meals and in some cases they are forced to eat food inappropriate to their religion), housing, and family life, and is emblematic of the state controlling the lives of the most vulnerable individuals within its jurisdiction. Residents' families are often forced to live in one room, and single residents have to share rooms with single-parent families, often from cultures alien to their own, thus infringing their right to privacy.

Asylum seekers are required to remain in the centre allocated to them – three nights' absence leads to them losing their place and their application for asylum being withdrawn or refused. Many years in direct provision hostels result in people becoming de-skilled, bored, depressed and institutionalised, and often negatively impact on residents' mental health and the ability to lead a 'normal life'. According to FLAC, the direct provision scheme is an unfair system which does not meet the needs of vulnerable people.

Addressing the specific needs of women in direct provision centres, AkiDwA (2010) points out that there are no centres for single vulnerable women who have suffered gender-based violence or who have been trafficked to Ireland. Children of persons seeking asylum are entitled to free primary and post primary education, but not to free (or EU fee) third level education – particularly jeopardising young people's prospects for integration. Women expressed concerns about the lack of privacy (including opening personal letters by centre management, and CCTV surveillance within the centres), and reported being sexually harassed outside direct provision centres. Women also spoke about experiencing racism, isolation and discrimination (AkiDwA, 2010: 18-9). Somali Muslim women are particularly disadvantaged by living in direct provision, as this Somali asylum seeker highlights:

At first it was so hard for me. I was sharing a room with people from a different religion...The food here is not halal and they cook pork which is against my religion. Sometimes we can cook for ourselves but if I eat food that is not halal, just pray to God and say thank you for a safe place. We have no access to a Mosque which is also difficult for me (National Women's Council of Ireland, 2010: 42).

Centres were reported to have varying standards of hygiene and cleanliness, making it particularly difficult for women to bring up their children in safety. One woman quoted by AkiDwA summarised the living condition thus: 'living in direct provision puts us at a mental health risk. It's upsetting to hear about deportations... we feel isolated, depressed and sad. It's upsetting when you see things happening to your friends' (AkiDwA, 2010: 12).

In August 2010, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service was facing a backlog of 11,700 'leave to remain' cases. However, the DJELR– due mostly to financial considerations – announced a review into cases of asylum seekers who have been waiting for five years or more for a decision. While not an amnesty, the review could benefit a small number of asylum seekers with a view of granting them humanitarian leave to remain (Smyth, 2010b).

All these and other issues were reported by our participants, who spoke about their experiences of reception and direct provision that seriously impact on their prospects of settlement in Ireland, as discussed in section 6.1.

3.1 Somalis in Ireland

The numbers of Somalis in the Republic of Ireland is difficult to estimate because of the complex histories of forced migration, the limitations of available statistical data, and the fact that numerical growth due to secondary migration of Somalis from other EU states and/or thorough family reunification is not easily verifiable. This mirrors the situation in other countries and has implications for reception and integration policies: inaccurate statistical information 'results in a distorted view of the numbers of Somalis who may require specific settlement services aimed at asylum seekers and refugees, and presents difficulty in assessing the needs of Somalis overall' (Hopkins, 2006:367). Even in UK, where there have been many studies on Somali refugees and asylum seekers, accurate figures are difficult to

extrapolate and numbers are still based on estimates (ibid; see tables 1 and 2 below).

Table 1. Top ten countries of origin of asylum seekers in the EU-27, 2008-2009

EU-27	2008	2009
Afghanistan	13,870	20,410
Russia	21,080	20,075
Somalia	17,645	19,070
Iraq	29,625	18,655
Kosovo	Not available*	14,240
Georgia	5,090	10,465
Nigeria	11,910	10,345
Pakistan	12,465	9,920
Iran	7,455	8,455
Zimbabwe	4,795	7,810

(Source: Eurostat, 2010)

Table 2: Top destination countries of Somali asylum seekers in Europe, 2009

%	2009	
27.6	Netherlands	6,025
27.1	Sweden	5,915
8.7	Norway	1,900
7.3	Italy	1,600
6.6	Malta	1,445
22.7	Other	4,955

(Source: Eurostat, 2010)

The Irish 2006 census does not have a detailed breakdown of population based on nationality and lists the number of Somali living in Ireland under the rubric of 'between 201 and 1000'.¹⁶ Data published by the UNHCR in 2005 reports that the number of Somalis applying for asylum in Ireland between 1996 and 2005 was 1,628. According to the Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform, from 1998 to 2007 there were 1,535 asylum applications from Somalia. In the same period of time 696 Somali applicants were granted refugee status (personal communication; see table 3 below).

Table 3: Main nationalities of asylum applicants in Ireland (1996-2005)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Nigeria	9	665	1,729	1,895	3,405	3,461	4,050	3,110	1,776	1,278
Romania	428	857	998	2,226	2,386	1,348	1,677	691	286	385
Somalia	139	258	75	123	138	70	77	183	198	367
Sudan	10	12	15	38	39	26	50	70	145	203
Iran	7	1	1	2	24	27	17	48	72	202

(Source: UNHCR, 2005)

¹⁶<http://www.cso.ie/census/documents/NON%20IRISH%20NATIONALS%20LIVING%20IN%20IRELAND.pdf>

Between January and July 2008, ORAC received 352 applications from Somali nationals. Unfortunately statistics are not available for the following months as ORAC only reports precise numbers of applications received from the top five countries in its annual and monthly reports. Data for the year 2009 are even less reliable as there is no direct mention of how many applications were received from Somali nationals each month, with the exception of August 2009 (72 applications) and September 2009 (75). Precise statistical data on how many Somalis received refugee status or subsidiary protection in 2008-2009 are not available. However figures for Ireland published by Eurostat indicate that 44.1% of asylum applicants from Somalia were granted protection in the first instance and 17% at the appeal stage in 2008.¹⁷ These percentages are lower than in most countries in Europe, where three out of four Somalis are granted protection status at first instance, but considerably high when compared to Ireland's overall rate of recognition. Data about the number of applications for family reunification received from Somali nationals and the number of Somalis arriving through family reunification are also not readily available. According to ORAC, roughly 10% of the applications for family reunification in 2008-2010 (April) were from Somali nationals.

According to data collected by RIA there were 282 Somalis living in direct provision as of the end of July 2010. In addition to Somalis living in direct provision hostels, Suleiman Abdulahi from HAPA identified about 112 Somalis living in different cities or locations in Ireland (information provided by HAPA, May 2010): 'some people stay with their friends throughout the country. From our contacts with Somalis in all counties, I realise there are some people who are still waiting for decisions over seven years' (personal communication).

Table 4: Somali asylum seekers in Ireland: geographical distribution

County / location	Males	Females	Children	Total
Dublin	6	5	1	12
Cork	13	8	3	24
Galway	4	3	0	7
Louth (Dundalk)	7	6	2	15
Waterford	1	0	0	1
Limerick	13	1	0	14
Mosney	16	11	12	39
Total	60	34	17	112

(Source: Hapa, 2010)

Based on the statistics available and anecdotal evidence provided by HAPA, we estimate the number of Somalis living in Ireland to be between 2000 and 3000. This is only a rough estimate, and should not be regarded in any way as an official figure.

3.2 Racism against Africans in Ireland

Black Africans and Travellers appear to have had the most frequent experiences of racism (43.2% and 41.4% of them respectively stated having these experiences frequently) (Garner, 2004: 65).

Around 1997, the European Year Against Racism (EYAR), racism was publicly named for the first time, after years of denying that Irish people, having themselves been subject to racism in the diaspora, were capable of being racist. Public recognition that racism

¹⁷ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-09-092/EN/KS-SF-09-092-EN.PDF

does indeed exist engendered an active antiracism movement. However, writing in 2006, Lentin and McVeigh (2006) argued that the moment of optimism born around the EYAR has gone, though this did not mean that racism was eradicated, or, until the onset of the recession early in 2009, that what they term the ‘interculturalism industry’ ceased to exist. On the contrary, a whole range of NGOs and government bodies as well as migrant-led groups put racism on their list of activities, though most concentrate on promoting diversity and interculturalism, thus often becoming part of the problem rather than its solution.

Rather than regard racism as individual prejudice (although it is also often that too), our theorisation of racism is linked to state racism and the categorisation of different population groups, whose entitlements vary accordingly. Theorising the Republic of Ireland, like other modern nation-states, as a ‘racial state’ (Goldberg, 2002) is appropriate to discussing racism against immigrants, and in particular African immigrants. ‘The Irish state’s commitment to encouraging “diversity” and at the same time restricting in-migration to include only those migrants “we” need to maintain “our way of life”... [denies] racism and [reproduces] “racism without racism”’ (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006: 18).

Despite the denial, evidence of racism in Ireland abounds. All studies of racism in Ireland – both studies of Irish attitudes and studies of the experience of racialised minorities – indicate that black Africans experience higher levels of racism than other racialised groups, perhaps with the exception of Travellers. Steve Garner, who surveyed various attitudinal studies measuring racism in Ireland between the 1970s and 2000, finds an ‘intensification of hostile attitudes, in the wake of increased migration to Ireland in the 1990s. One of the most disturbing trends, reflected in surveys done by Eurobarometer (2000), was the affirmative response to the question “do you find the presence of minorities to be disturbing” by 42% (compared with only 16% in 1997)’ (Garner, 2004: 63).

As early as 1999, the African Refugee Network documented racism against black Africans (ARN, 1999). In 2001 an Amnesty International study found that 43% of black African respondents said they experienced racial abuse frequently. Two thirds of all respondents stated that they were not treated fairly by the authorities when arriving in Ireland; 26% of African respondents experienced racism by an immigration officer and 88.6% of African respondents felt not enough was being done to educate the public about racism, while 93% felt the government was not doing enough to combat racism. 56% of all respondents felt they were not treated fairly by the Gardai, and in general, black and ethnic minorities living in Ireland had little faith in the government to deliver on antiracism programmes (AI, 2001).

Specific discourses demonising asylum seekers and blaming migrants in general and asylum seekers in particular for the shortcomings of the social system – which Balibar (1991) calls ‘crisis racism’ – were widely present in the run up to the 2004 Citizenship Referendum.¹⁸ In the run up to the referendum, migrant mothers giving birth to future Irish citizens, and in particular the figure of the pregnant or child bearing African migrant became the emblem of ‘crisis racism’ (Lentin, 2004).

More recent research shows that Ireland ranks among the worst countries in Europe in terms of racial discrimination of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. According to 2009 research by the Fundamental Rights Agency, Sub Saharan African migrants in Ireland are among the top ten racialised groups in terms of experiences of racism (54%). The report also revealed that the majority of respondents did not report their experiences of racism and in many cases did not report assaults, threats and serious harassment because they believed nothing would happen if they did (*Irish Examiner*, 2009).¹⁹ A 2010 Human Rights Watch report on Ireland noted that ‘societal discrimination and violence against immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities, including Asians, Eastern and Baltic Europeans and Africans, continued to be a problem’. The report noted racially motivated incidents involving

¹⁸ This constitutional referendum aimed to change the *jus solis* citizenship entitlement to all people born on the island of Ireland to *jus sanguinis* entitlement whereby only children of citizens born in Ireland were entitled to citizenship, reversing a birthright available since 1922.

¹⁹ Interestingly, the report includes Somalis in Finland (47%) and Somalis in Denmark (46%) among the top ten groups experiencing highest levels of racial discrimination.

physical violence, intimidation, graffiti, and verbal slurs. NGOs reported an increase in 'Irish only' job advertisements, and the Economic and Social Research Institute (O'Connell and McGinnity, 2008) noted that job candidates with typical Irish names were more likely to be appointed than those with non-Irish names' (*Irish Examiner*, 2010).²⁰

There are no studies available in relation to the specific experience of racism and discrimination of Somalis living in Ireland, though discrimination and racism against Somalis in Europe and elsewhere have been well documented. According to Pérouse de Montclos Somalis in western countries are doubly at risk of racism as black people and Muslims (2003: 49). Furthermore, as most Somalis enter Europe as refugees or asylum seekers, they have to bear the brunt of political, media and popular discourses which have increasingly demonised and racialised asylum seekers. In Denmark, for instance, the reception of Somali refugees has been particularly negative with the media and politicians focusing on problems of integration and cultural difference: as a consequence Somalis have been targeted for repatriation more than other groups of refugees (Valentine and Sporton, 2009). The extent of hostile feelings against Somalis living in Denmark has resulted in what Valentine and Sporton describe as 'Somaliphobia', a form of discrimination embracing both Islamophobia and racism (ibid: 243). Pratt and Valverde argue that in Canada fears about 'welfare fraud', about 'bogus refugees', and about 'racialised crime', whipped up by government officials and media headlines have had 'particularly dire effects on Toronto's Somali community' (2002:135). In the UK the discovery that two of the suicide bombers involved in the failed attacks in London on July 21, 2005, were refugees from Somalia reignited the debate around whether the Muslim faith was compatible with 'western values' and contributed to increased hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers (Omar, 2007: 39-44). In Norway Somali women experience specific forms of gendered discrimination, and often feel stereotyped as 'victims' by locals due to the veil and the fact that they have been circumcised (Fangen, 2006: 81-2).

²⁰ <http://examiner.ie/ireland/crime/time-to-face-reality-of-racism->

4. Collaborative research methodology: process, theory, practice

This study arises out of collaboration between the Migrant Networks Project, Trinity Immigration Initiative²¹ and HAPA – the Horn of Africa People’s Aid, and was carried out at HAPA’s request with the aim of identifying the issues and needs facing Somali refugees in Ireland, and of proposing a set of policy recommendations.

As part of the Migrant Networks Project, using documentary analysis, ethnographic research and internet searches, we collected data on migrant-led groups and associations in contemporary Ireland, identifying some 430 migrant-led groups.²² The wealth of information led us to argue that migrants as a rule do more than the Irish state in order to integrate themselves and their groups into Irish society. Our commitment to migrant-led activism led to working in close collaboration with several groups, including AkiDwA – the African and Migrant Women’s Network, The New Communities Partnership, The Africa Centre, Diaspora Women’s Initiative and HAPA.

This study is informed by feminist and antiracist research methodologies, aiming to critique the ‘institutions of ruling’ and at the same time work towards the liberation and empowerment of disadvantaged groups, including refugees and asylum seekers. As detailed below, we use qualitative methods, attempting to maintain our collaboration with HAPA, our partner in this study, by feeding back our data and by referring to HAPA members in identifying research themes and questions. Constructing a mutual relationship between researcher and researched is a key principle of this study, and as migrants ourselves, we may be bringing a degree of understanding and empathy to the study. Importantly, in deciding how to call our research collaborators, we prefer the term ‘participants’ above more passive terms such as ‘research subjects’ and ‘respondents’, indicating their centrality to this study’s research findings. Although participation was mostly relevant to the process of interviewing, some participants took a more central part in the process by acting as translators when interviews were conducted in Somali.

However, conducting collaborative research based on participatory, antiracist methodologies presents its own challenges. Patai (1991: 147) has argued that only in research projects that are in the control of the community can ethical research be conducted to any extent without exploiting research participants. Full collaboration is not possible without setting up a model of constant feedback of research finding – which we were unable to do due to time constraints, yet collaboration is never a smooth path. The very act of attempting to empower research participants runs the risk of perpetuating the relations of dominance, and the difference between the commitment to empower and the impossibility to confer power is important to remember (Humphries, 1997: 3.6). Even careful attention to reflexivity and the researcher’s positionality, while fundamental in emancipatory research in privileging consultation, participation and feedback, does not dismantle power relations in the research process.

Indeed, scholars have argued that collaborative research – particularly when researching disadvantaged groups and addressing traumatic issues – may place heavier burden on the researched, particularly when issues of race, ethnicity, gender and class are not explicitly addressed (Riessman, 1987; Byrne and Lentin, 2000). These limitations notwithstanding, we hope that the process of collaboration has been facilitated by getting the researched to determine the agenda by dictating the themes and questions to be addressed and fixing interview venues, and by allowing mutual self disclosure.

More practically this study is based on documentary and ethnographic research and data collected through a mixture of interviews and community consultations. We conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews to gather data from individual participants. The semi-

²¹ www.tcd.ie/immigration/networks

²² <http://www.tcd.ie/immigration/networks/mapping.php>

structured nature of these interviews meant that a sequence of questions was asked of all participants. This sequence was not rigid and additional questions were added. Whenever possible we tried to allow participants to tell their stories in the way they felt appropriate, so that themes relevant to them would emerge spontaneously. The thematic areas we explored were: the journey to Ireland, initial resettlement, housing, education, employment, family reunification, and generational issues. These themes had been identified by HAPA's members based on their community support work and after consultations with Somalis who avail of their services. It is important to acknowledge that these domains are intersectional, and cannot be considered in isolation. The interviews were conducted in English or in Somali with the use of an interpreter. Following discussion with our participants we agreed not to use their real names in order to safeguard their privacy.²³

Our analysis is grounded in the narrative data we collected. As a contextualizing introduction to analysing the needs of Somalis refugees in Ireland, as arising from the interviews, we highlight the precarious journeys people experienced on their way to Ireland.

Another important issue relating to collaborative research is the ownership of the final written text, usually maintained by academic researchers. In this instance, however, as we embarked on this study at HAPA's request, we are putting the final study at HAPA's disposal to do as it wishes in making policy recommendations and ultimately working towards improving the conditions of Somali refugees in the Republic of Ireland. The study is also available on the Trinity Immigration Initiative's website and findings were presented at a public seminar at Trinity College in autumn 2010. In addition we also reserve the right to publish academic articles based on this study.

²³ Participants did not express many concerns in relation to issue of anonymity and had no objections to their real names being used. However the researchers strongly suggested that real names should be changed to respect participants' privacy, especially in light of the fact that the report was intended for public dissemination. Real names were substituted with other common Somali names. The only name not changed was Suleiman Abdulahi's.

5. The journey from Somalia to Ireland

...we left without nothing... I had nothing... only what I was wearing... I left and just said goodbye... (Suleiman, interview)

'The first concern of refugees is physical safety, for themselves and their children; it is the most basic of needs that caused them to leave their homeland, and achieving it is their primary goal in finding a new home' (McGown, 1999:14)

Because of the civil war and unending violence, hundreds of thousands of Somalis have fled their homeland seeking refuge in countries around the world (Samatar, 2004:10). Emigration has always been a feature of life in Somalia due to a particularly harsh ecological environment and their pastoralist way of life (Lewis, 2002: 7-8). This type of emigration was referred to as *tacabbir* or temporary adventure, implying the idea of return and travel to distant lands, and conjured up enterprise, self-sufficiency and worldliness. Since the breakout of the civil war the situation in Somalia has changed dramatically. According to Samatar (2004) in the past 30 years Somalia has entered the age of desperate exodus, or *qaxootin*, radically different from the type of migration Somalis had traditionally engaged in. Such differences are not simply a matter of numbers but refer to geographical displacement on a global scale, 'lost generations', and the disruption of family, emotional and cultural ties.

Leaving one's country as a refugee often results in a complex origin-destination relationship in as much as forced migrants are likely to experience 'the greatest loss of individual agency and decision-making ability and the related yielding of autonomy to institutional forces of various kind' (Day and White, 2001: 19). This situation was evident in the journeys and arrival circumstances of our participants. They left with nothing and arrived with minimal or no prior knowledge about Ireland.

I didn't know Ireland, actually... because in my country... most people know America... people ... they would go to America... even if somebody is in Europe... they would say 'oh, the person is in America'... so at the time I was coming I didn't know I was coming to Ireland... [Faduma]

I had never heard about Ireland... so when I arrived here, it was my first time to hear of and to see it... [Ayaan]

They didn't choose their destination and had to rely on the providers of forged documents and visas.²⁴

Because who decides the destination... the person has left behind everything, their families, their lives... and they fear... they are looking for safety... I didn't even have shoes when I left... so I was thinking to get to a safe place, I wasn't thinking about anything else... just get away from the problems.. and for the destination... it is the agent who decides [Suleiman]

²⁴ Facilitating migration and providing fake documents have become a lucrative business in a country still ravaged by conflict and lacking government control. The Monitoring Group on Somalia established by the UN Security Council stated that: '[s]ome government ministers and members of parliament abuse their official privileges to engage in large-scale visa fraud, smuggling illegal migrants to Europe and other destinations, in exchange for hefty payments' (2010:7).

It is not infrequent for Somalis to end up in a country which is not the one they had originally agreed to and paid for. One respondent said he was convinced he was going to Canada and that he had been 'cheated' by the agent. Suleiman, who often volunteers as a translator and interpreter for other Somalis, recalls that:

I met a Somali guy in Court and he was complaining in front of the Judge...saying that he was not supposed to go to Ireland, he was going to go to the United States... and the agent cheated him and brought him to Ireland... the agents bring the people where they can, where they can get away from... border guards... anti-human trafficking people...

Our participants had varied experiences en route to Ireland. All of them, but one, fled Somalia to a transit country where they secured a visa and travelling papers through an agent, often at extortionist prices.

[the journey to Ireland] was hard... because... at the beginning... my country is not in peace.. and the agent took me to Kenya and he took me into this house for eleven days and told me: 'don't come out... if you come outside... you may be arrested by Kenyan police'... so it was kind of fear.. too much fear... [Faduma]

I was in Dubai for two, three days... and then after that they took me... transit... I am not sure... we were there a few hours... after Dubai we were in another place, in transit... maybe France but I don't know... and then Dublin [Ayaan]

We paid the agent 10,000 US dollars for both of us... [Nuradin]

The decision to leave Somalia to seek refuge in a European country is often not an individual one but is taken 'collectively' within the family and represents a complex 'survival strategy'.

At the time I left we were all there [Somalia]... my family fled to Kenya in 2006... but before than it was still in Somalia... because it was very difficult for us to move we had some relatives and our grandmother there... she was old and not well... but when she passed away... and my mother passed away as well... so my family decided to send me... sometimes families, they talk... they had seen some other families doing that and my father said... he would like to send me...[...] my sister didn't know English, I used to know better English than her..... so he said that I should go, because of that... [Ayaan]

Decisions can often be extremely difficult and force mothers and fathers to consider who amongst their children may benefit more from leaving or may be better equipped to cope with the hardship of the journey. Faduma – who has a disability in her leg - left Somalia in 2004 while her family stayed behind.

My mother thought that the agent would bring all of us together.. and after the agent said... no... the money she had was only little... he could only take one person..at the time my mother didn't know what to do... she said 'because you are the eldest... you are the person who has difficulties running... we can run', my mother said.... She and my brother and sister... they can run... they can go anywhere... because at that time I was very ill... 'because we can run and do our things... but for you it is more difficult'...

Forced migration is especially painful for elderly people who must cope with the trauma associated with leaving the places where they have lived most of their lives.

oh... yes... I was scared... I left my country... my children behind... and I came here on my own... I arrived here alone... and I was remembering how... the pain... the loneliness... I was also remembering my children who I had left behind... all of them... [Sara]

For Hassan and his son the journey to Ireland was a case of 'secondary' migration from the UK, after their asylum application was rejected there as 'groundless'. Through the support and financial help of some UK-based Somali organisations, they managed to reach Northern Ireland and boarded a bus to Dublin. They had no travel documents, but carried only the letter issued by the UK government, refusing their application for refugee status.

When we left Somalia we came to Kenya and... we got an agent from Kenya... and he brought us to the UK... we came in 2003... to UK... and we applied for asylum [...] for the first six months, they gave us accommodation... an apartment... and they were giving us also a living... allowance... during the asylum process... and then the agency sent me a letter saying that... your case is closed... your process was denied... you are not entitled to get accommodation and a living allowance as the case has been closed... and then we went to the Somali community... people from Somali community in the UK after we became homeless and couldn't support ourselves... they gave us something to eat and after almost one year... about eleven months after the decision... they just give us some money so that we can travel and we travelled from the UK to Ireland... and we came to Ireland by ourselves... [Hassan]

Some participants have lost track of their families or left family members in refugee camps which are often as dangerous as the places they escaped from.

My family.... Is one of the parts I am worrying all the time... when I was in the asylum process I was tracing... searching them through the Red Cross ... they look for... you know... missing families, they have a special programme ... and we received... some information... where they were twice... in 2006 and 2007... but after 2007 we disconnected again and I don't know where they are... [Nuradin]

Because it is becoming increasingly difficult for Somalis to gain entry into Europe, some embark on a desperate journey across the Sahara desert, to Libya and then to Italy, Malta or Greece. Ahmad came to Ireland in 2004 and was granted refugee status in 2005. When he left, his family was still in Somalia but since then things have changed dramatically. His mother and sister sought refuge in Ethiopia, whereas his brothers reached Italy after a harrowing journey through the desert and across the Mediterranean Sea.

My brothers are in Italy... the way of Libya... desert... Malta... you know...small boat... [...] it is dangerous but at the end of the day they survived... [...] they are in Rome... they don't want to get status there because the situation of asylum seekers is very bad there... so they are planning to go to another European State like Sweden... Holland... you know... England or Ireland... I think it is not easy but... [...] some friends and their families they support them... and some... church...and charities...me also I support them... I send some money... [Ahmad]

In recent years many Somalis escaping violence, persecution and misery have attempted what Suleiman called – during one of our many discussions – 'the Latin American route'.²⁵

²⁵ Among the migrants in transit detained in Nicaragua's Detention Centre it is possible to find undocumented travellers from China, Japan, Somalia, Guinea, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (Rocha, 2008:155).

Right now there are people from Somalia going all the way to South America... and come through the back door to the United States, they go to Mexico and through Mexico to the States... [...] nobody can stop this... because people try in any way they can to escape from the problems... so many people died while escaping... many of my friends died in the Sahara... between Sudan and Libya... they travelled from Kenya all the way to Ethiopia and then through the Sahara.... And they died... some of them died after they boarded from Libya.. in the small boats...and when they come to Italy... what happens to them? They end up disaster... they don't have any good asylum system... [Suleiman]

6. Somali refugees in Ireland

'A man who has travelled, a *wayo' arag*, is one who knows a great deal, has seen things, has lived' (Rousseau et al. 1998: 386)

Initial reception, employment, housing, education, family reunification and the young generation have been identified as the most problematic areas affecting the resettlement experiences of Somalis in Ireland and elsewhere (Samatar, 2004). One of the reasons for conducting the present study is the observation by research participants, and in particular by HAPA's volunteers, that Somalis in Ireland are similarly neglected and that the issues confronting them are not adequately addressed. In this report we focus on several issues: participants' initial reception in Ireland, their housing conditions and housing needs, employment, education and the younger generation, and family reunification. It was also our intention to analyse gender issues but our interview data did not reflect specific gender issues. However, we can safely assume that Somali women in Ireland, like other African and migrant women, experience gendered discrimination as identified by AkiDwA's research on employment issues (AkiDwA, 2007), health issues (AkiDwA, 2008a; 2008b), and on women's experiences in direct provision asylum hostels (AkiDwA, 2010).

As mentioned above, very little is known on the resettlement issues and strategies of Somali refugees and asylum seekers living in Ireland. However there is a vast body of research from Australia, Canada, the US, Scandinavian countries and the UK, which reveals a picture of extremely high unemployment, inadequate housing, educational disadvantage, poor health and difficulties in accessing mainstream social services.

In Norway '[a]ccording to most indicators of living standards, Somalis are the refugee group that has poorest ratings. They are more often unemployed than any other groups of first-generation immigrants in Norway' (Fangen, 2006: 74). Apart from unemployment, Somalis encounter difficulties in securing appropriate housing, are more likely to live in rented accommodation and fare worse in relation to many mental health indicators (ibid). Somalis in Denmark are 'often described as a relatively weak group with severe social problems, including a very low employment rate' (Fink-Nielsen et al., 2004: 27; see also Danso, 2001, in relation to Somalis settlement experience in Canada; and Pittaway and Muli, 2009, in relation to Australia).

Even in the UK, where Somali migration is over a century old, the situation of Somalis who have arrived more recently – *mostly* as asylum seekers – is a matter of concern. Writing about Somali refugees in Tower Hamlets in London, Griffiths (2000: 285) speaks of 'entrenched disadvantage' and of acute social marginalisation compounded by invisibility and perceived institutional neglect. In relation to institutional neglect, research conducted by a Somali Task Force in Tower Hamlets highlighted the following problems: lack of consultation with the Somali community, failure to address the needs of especially vulnerable groups (single parents, elderly and youth), and the absence of political will to resolve these issues (ibid).

6.1 Initial reception

Life as a refugee attempting to create a new life in an unfamiliar country is filled with uncertainties. [...] In many respects, refugees start at the bottom rung of the new social hierarchy. They find their competence is not recognised, and they are instead reduced to being only this, a refugee. This diminishment is at the core of the concept of humiliation' (Fangen, 2006: 69-70)

Eight of the people we interviewed arrived in Ireland as asylum seekers and therefore spent some time in direct provision. The emotional and health consequences of spending prolonged time in direct provision have been well documented (section 3). In relation to this, Zetter writes that:

[a] 'dispersed asylum seeker' in the UK and Ireland [...] is more than a bureaucratic category. It is a transformative process which is imposed not chosen, which excludes, not incorporates. It marginalises the refugee from his/her social and cultural milieu, alienates him/her from local hosts who understandably resent impoverished migrants forcibly dispersed into their already deprived communities, and compels the claimants to live in controlled poverty (Zetter, 2007:182).

For Zetter (2007: 182) the direct provision centres have ironically come to mirror the 'iconic refugee camps of the developing world in the 1970s and 1980s', an observation our participants bore witness to, by using the word 'camps' to refer to the hostels they were accommodated in.

One participant described her life in direct provision as 'living in prison'; and all participants spoke of the disheartening effects of boredom, lack of social networks, enforced poverty and inability to use one's potential.

I spent three years in Limerick... it was very difficult... I don't like to discuss it... but it was like prison... I was feeling I was in jail... because... I was living in very difficult conditions... sharing with other two people in a room and the room was... I was... when I was sick... they were just playing music... [Sara]

Faduma, who spent four years in a direct provision centre in Waterford before being granted 'leave to remain' in Ireland, spoke of the loneliness and isolation she experienced and of the depersonalising effects of the imposed routines:

[in the hostel] it was peaceful... because I wasn't getting any harm; I wasn't getting any raped... I wasn't getting... like beaten... but it was again... you don't know anybody... you are living there... you don't get any communication with your family... [...] I felt lonely... you would just wake up... go and take food... go back to sleep... it was just... there is no activity... no nothing... you are not doing anything... it was hard...when I was in the hostel I used to feel that way... [whereas] now... not that much because... I am somebody who can do her own things... I can think... 'oh, let's go and just do this now'... you can cook what you like to cook... like if you want to cook Somali food... but when you are in a place where you are queuing for the food and sometimes...you look at the food and say 'no, I cannot eat this food today'... and you just go back to your room and for a week maybe... you just take toast and tea...

Nuradin, a participant in his late twenties came to Ireland with his father (Hassan), who became blind after being tortured by militia army members. They spent 14 months in Baleskin and were living in Mosney where no special provisions were made to accommodate Hassan's disability:

the accommodation [in Mosney] is not bad... we have two beds in the asylum centre... but all other things... if you go... if you want to get food... to the toilet... everywhere... everything is queue... and we have to walk from the bus... when we are coming to Dublin or going to the city... two kilometers... we have to walk... and it is very cold weather and my father cannot travel those distances... it is very difficult for him.

The mental, emotional and physical effects of living in direct provision, and of asylum and reception policies, can be devastating:

[When we were in] Baleskin... everywhere we go... a lot of thinking... stress for our lives... and we became dismoral [demoralised] totally feeling hopeless... and my father was... worrying and so sad... and he is sick... so many times I took him to the emergency, in the hospital... [Hassan]

Another respondent, a 70 years old Somali woman, who spent three years in direct provision in Limerick and another two in Mosney, describes how her emotional and physical health deteriorated during this period:

In Limerick, I was sick... I had blood pressure... heart disease... I was sick in the heart... and also I had lot of headaches... all the time... so I spent one week in the asylum centre... and two weeks in the hospital... so I was in and out all the time... and also I was not getting enough food... the food was not... appropriate... the diet was not correct... the food I was getting was not suitable for me at all... I was in between hospital and the hostel... [...] most of... the sickness started in 2004... when I was still in the asylum centre... I was healthy when I arrived here... first... it was blood pressure... and then I had gastritis... and in October, last year... I had an operation in my heart... [...] I also took medicines for my depression... and also... I used sleeping tablets... [Sara]

All of our participants, except one, came to Ireland as asylum seekers and they had to go through the stressful process of proving they were 'genuine refugees'. The lack of transparency in the decision making process, the length of status determination, the injunction of providing more and more proofs of the legitimacy of one's claims have disempowering effects – especially considering Ireland's high rate of rejection of asylum claims as reported in section 3 (Haughey, 2000) – often leading to frustration, anger, confusion and distress.

2008... that was the year they gave me leave to remain in the country... when my first application was refused... I felt... that maybe they didn't trust me... what I was telling them... they were telling me... 'you can live your life in Kenya'... it was difficult... [...] it was frustrating because... because you come from your country, you come to a peace country... you tell them all your problems and... they take all the information and everything and after that they refuse it... they say 'no'... it is hard... [Faduma]

Nuradin, who came to Ireland with his father Hassan who is blind, has had his application for asylum rejected. While the father was granted refugee status as a member of a persecuted minority – his membership status was established through a language test – Nuradin's application was refused on the ground that he had failed the same language test. This case highlights important issues concerning the rights of individuals to preserve the unity of the family and points to the lack of transparency in how the Irish authorities deal with asylum claims, and to the extent of discretion in such cases, as has been argued again and again by refugee-support NGOs and activists.

I don't believe there is any law... or any way in the world... any condition that allows a father who is blind and his son [to be] separated by law... and say 'you are entitled to become a refugee in this country and your son is not'... I fear this is not legal... and that is something... it is not the right way of dealing with an asylum case... I believe the decision on our asylum cases... depends on individuals... it is not by law... I don't believe that... this is human rights or refugee law... I believe this is someone's discretion... it is not according to the law... [...] the person who decided my case and the person who decided my son's case... they are not looking for constitution or law but they decided by their own power... our problem was identified and investigated by four agencies... SPIRASI, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland, the psychiatrist and also through the language test...all the proofs we provided... the Court has

everything...after many years I got status but my son... got negative and I don't understand... [Hassan]

As Zetter (2007: 181) argues the 'criminalisation' of asylum seekers, 'institutionalised in the immigration statutes, policies and practices of most European states' (see also Joly, 1996; Schuster, 2003) has had fundamental consequences in terms of how people's right to asylum has been increasingly subordinated to discourses of State security. One of the consequences of this process has been the creation of bureaucratic labels of limited 'protection' – like leave to remain – which among other things, limit people's right to family reunification and naturalisation (see section 6.6).

The status I got [leave to remain]... I am appreciating... for the Irish authorities to help me and give me some form of status... but the status I got is leave to remain... and I cannot travel where I want to travel... I cannot bring... family... I cannot apply for my children... my children... I applied... first when I got the papers... I thought I could do that...and then I got the negative... for family reunification... and that is something very negative for me... because I was not expecting it.. and they said... 'you have no rights to apply for family reunification with this document'... this status... leave to remain... or what they call it... temporary permission... it is not... I have no right at all to family reunification... [...] after five years... I spent in asylum centre, I have no right to bring my children... [Sara]

People who spend prolonged periods as asylum seekers are effectively blocked from accessing education and employment as discussed below. Enforced poverty and isolation do not only cause great hardship for newly arrived individuals but also severely limits their ability to stay in contact and financially or emotionally support families left behind. The unity of the family, already put under enormous pressure by displacement and prolonged separation, may become compromised by asylum policies which put people's life projects on indefinite hold. However, despite the frustration, hardship and length of time spent in direct provision, all the participants expressed gratitude towards the Irish government for affording them 'protection' and allowing them to stay:

We appreciate... the Irish authorities... government which gave us asylum... peace... security and protection and that was the main reason which brought us here [...] and since we arrived until now... we appreciated... the help and support we had... they never stopped to give us shelter... we have shelter... we have something to eat... a roof on our head... and we have to appreciate that... if they had thrown us out... we would have ended up homeless so... the situation is not as bad as it could have happened but now... life is still difficult... [Nuradin]

Once people receive refugee status or leave to remain, they have to leave direct provision centres and look for independent accommodation. At this stage they are entitled to seek employment, access welfare services and enjoy the same rights as Irish citizens. However there is no comprehensive resettlement programme in place for refugees leaving the direct provision system to ease the transition.

It is ok here [in Ireland]... it is ok... only I find it a bit difficult... [...] there is no proper information... like: 'this is the new land you are in... this is the culture'... and they have to know your culture as well... what is wrong or right... things like that... but there was no organisation explaining to you: 'this is the way you have to do it, this is the right thing' [Nasir]

The interviews revealed first, a general lack of coordinated re-settlement support services dealing with the refugees' accommodation, employment and education needs, and second, the limitations of mainstreaming, the government's declared approach to dealing with integration. Despite the existence of many services, people do not know about their

existence or may be deterred from approaching them due to linguistic and other barriers. We now turn to discussing the issues surrounding housing, employment, education, the young generation, and family reunification.

6.2 Housing

The relationship between housing and integration is particularly important as housing location and type can be factors that impact on access to services, local community facilities and social networks. This relationship is also affected by broader policies on migration and legal status, social inclusion, anti-poverty, anti-discrimination, income and employment (Focus Ireland and The Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009: 8)

Five of the nine Somalis we interviewed spent time in direct provision centres before being granted refugee status or leave to remain. Three other participants, who arrived as unaccompanied minors, were housed in accommodation provided by the Health Services Executive (HSE) and eventually moved into independent accommodation.

Claire Breen (2008: 616) argues that the policy of direct provision in Ireland constitutes 'a violation of asylum seekers' right to an adequate standard of housing', and that it is based on a very restrictive interpretation of one's right to 'adequate shelter'.²⁶ It is not surprising that the opportunity to live independently, in a place of one's choice, was regarded by all participants as central to their sense of autonomy and self-worth. For some of them access to housing meant having a place to call 'home' for the first time after years in direct provision and being able to enjoy personal space and privacy.

When we interviewed them five participants were living in privately rented accommodation, two in a direct provision centre (Mosney), one in a YMCA centre for homeless youth and one in independent accommodation provided by the HSE.

The process of finding accommodation was not an easy one: because participants lacked well-established social networks and financial means and were under pressure to find a place quickly, they had to accept sub-standard accommodation in low-income areas or spend periods of time with friends. The fact that they were receiving rent allowance also restricted the type of accommodation available to them to choose from, as many landlords are reluctant to let to social welfare recipients (although this has partly changed with the recession). Focus Ireland and the Immigrant Council of Ireland (2009: 10) report that people living on rent allowance experience significant problems in finding suitable, long-term, good quality accommodation:

I got my friend to help me... because I couldn't find it...sometimes you see some nice houses and they ask you 'are you on social welfare, rent allowance?'... you say 'yes' and they say: 'sorry we don't take you'... can you believe me? [Ayaan]

Participants also highlighted the general lack of targeted support services for people looking for accommodation after they leave reception centres. This runs counter to the refugees' right to adequate housing as outlined in Article 21 of the Refugee Convention 'which imposes a positive obligation upon the state, including all relevant public authorities, such as municipalities, to accord to refugees the most favourable treatment possible' (Breen, 2008: 615). Due to the lack of specific support services catering for the housing needs of

²⁶ The meaning of the right to adequate housing set out in Article 25(1) of the UDHR has been expanded upon by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) which stated that: '[adequate shelter] means adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities' (CESCR, The Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11 (1)): 13 Dec. 91, General Comment 4, para. 7.

those leaving the asylum system, Somali refugees must rely on friends, community members and information obtained through word of mouth or the internet.

I was living in Waterford and I had a friend here in Dublin... and I explained to her that I had difficulties...and she knew that I find it difficult to walk around and she just told me that... it was better for me to come to Dublin because of the transportation system...so... I just took a van... I had to hire a van... and put my things... [...] when I came to Dublin... I stayed with this lady for two months... because I had to find a room to live in... you don't get... an office to go there and say... 'ok, I am moving to Dublin... I need help'... there is no place like that... so you have to find a house on your own... so I was looking for a house for two months and after that I got a room in the same building as this lady... [Faduma]

The feeling of not knowing where to go to ask for support or not knowing what one's entitlements are, especially when matters are couched in professional and official language was expressed by other participants. Even when an individual does possess sufficient knowledge of the social service systems, responsibility may be highly dispersed and diffused, making it difficult to deal with a problematic situation. One young respondent who was at risk of becoming homeless lamented the lack of orientation services for young refugees and recalled the frustration he felt at being 'shunted off' from one office to another:

I went to the address they gave me when I got my status and I was trying to claim... some accommodation... and they told me... 'a new law is coming up on the 24th of July... 2009'... and the woman was saying... they were playing the game... Dublin City Council and the welfare... the welfare was saying 'go to Dublin City Council, they will assist you with your application form...' and then when you go there... they were saying... 'it is going to take up to six months for Dublin City Council to assist your application form..' and the welfare was saying: 'oh... you have to be homeless for six months so I can help you...' [Nasir]

Sara, an elderly woman with limited English, relied on the help provided by other Somalis to find a place to stay after leaving Mosney:

So, I moved... and there is no state agency or any authority to help me at all... apart from my community... Somali members of the community were assisting me... to find a place... a friend... someone from Somalia helped... doing translating... to call the landlord and then I went to the church... and he helped me to go to the church and make interpretation... and translating... through that way, we found the property... [Sara]

Charities and church-based organisations also provide information on housing and accommodation.

I am still looking for a place... I always look for places... I go to... there is a Church there.. St Vincent de Paul... I put my name down and they look for me.... I explained to them my difficulties [...] they help me always when I go there... if I need filling forms... or speaking with the ESB... if you have difficulties... sometimes I don't understand how they write the bills... I take them to them and they help me [Faduma]

According to community representatives, Somalis, like the majority of migrants in Ireland (Duffy, 2007), depend on the private sector where the competition for good quality housing can be fierce and landlords can choose between many prospective tenants. Ahmad has been trying to find a house in Dublin 6 or 8, areas which he sees as safe and well-serviced, for months, but to no avail:

I am living with my friend now... temporarily... I am trying to get a house... many times... I tried to get a house... when I see a house and it is ok... I try to pay the deposit... they say... 'ok... it is my choice... I have a lot of customers ... so give your number and I will ring you again'... and no one rings me... [...] maybe the landlord is not comfortable... maybe he is looking for... I don't know... I can't explain that... because it is his choice... he says: 'It is my house... a lot of people come here... just leave your name and number... and I'll ring you..' [Ahmad]

Research across Europe has found that the most significant problems of housing quality and security are experienced in the privately rented sector, with evidence from several countries of private landlords discriminating against minority ethnic groups (Edgar et al., 2004). An interesting finding emerged through the interviews in relation to housing and more specifically on how some landlords take advantage of the Rent Supplement system to overcharge tenants. In Ireland Rent Supplement is paid to people living in privately rented accommodation who cannot provide the cost of their accommodation from their own resources. In general, people qualify for Rent Supplement if their only income comes from social welfare or HSE sources. The amount of Rent Supplement is calculated by a community welfare office in such a way as to ensure that someone's income, after paying rent, does not fall below a minimum level. The amount calculated is reduced by 24 euro which the recipient has to contribute towards the rent. Rent Supplement is provided for accommodation which meets certain minimum standards and the rent is below the maximum rent level (which varies for each county). The rent paid to a landlord (that is, the tenant's contribution plus Rent Supplement) must not be above the maximum rent level set for a county or area (see www.citizensinformation.ie). Two participants stated that their landlords charge them more than the sum stipulated in the letting agreement, which, on paper, did not exceed the maximum rent level.

In Cork...I was looking for a place... I was living in a place for one month... and then... it was very expensive weekly... I topped up about 50 euro weekly... and normally the government... they knew only 120... but me and my landlord... we had to deal something else... he wrote the letter... 120 as the government system... but I had to top up some money... [...] it is an injustice... but we have to do it... we don't get house if we don't do it... houses are very expensive... and... the amount the government pays is very small and then... we have to have some houses to survive... [Ahmad]

Because of their limited financial resources and lack of employment, people have little choice in relation to the type of accommodation they are able to afford. Financial difficulties are compounded by poor English and limited knowledge of how to access the rental market.

I cannot seek a bigger place... first I cannot speak the language... I cannot communicate with the people renting places... I cannot go to internet and search myself properties... the first place... a young man from Somalia helped me... that is how I found the place... and at the same time... I don't know where I am going to get the money to pay the rent even if I get someone to help me to find it... so there is no prospect to getting a bigger place. [Sara]

Housing is not simply a matter of access to accommodation but is also about its size and quality:

I am a sick person... and I still live in a small room... where... it is an uncomfortable place where... the cooking is in here...and I am sleeping in the same place... and I am a sick person... and I don't have a suitable accommodation, after five years... I spent in asylum centre... yeah...as I said I am not very happy.. it is a very small place... it is like this table....I am cooking and still I am sitting on my bed... this is where I am sleeping... and here is where I cook... my bed is here and at the corner is

the kitchen... and the toilet.. it is very small place which is not suitable for living at all... [Sara]

Living in a small place has implications for indoor social interactions and the opportunity to enjoy a fulfilling social life:

it is a bit difficult inviting people I don't invite much... maybe when I cook... one person, two persons... the lady [who lives in the same building] especially... because there is no privacy...because it is one room... so if you bring a lot of people it is a bit difficult [Sara]

Another fundamental aspect is the need for safety and security. Participants spoke of living in areas where they felt 'unsafe' because of racism or tensions related to entrenched social and economic deprivation. Because of high dependency on the private sector and limited financial resources, Somalis, like many other refugees, are likely to live in low-income, poorly serviced, and socially deprived areas (see 2006 Census). Changing demographics and a perceived competition for scarce resources in such areas result in 'indigenous Irish' people resenting or blaming the presence of migrants in their areas (Ní Chonail, 2009).²⁷ One male participant reported being victim of repeated racial harassment from local youth and hinted at the lack of policing in the area where he lives:

In my area... there are lots of kids... they live besides us... city council houses... a lot of kids live there and there is trouble ... some fighting... we have to... go home early... by bus... we can't walk... we can't go shopping... [...] they are just like... 'Hey what are you doing? Hey you!'... four or five kids... they try to hit you... one day I just ran away... because I can't fight five or six people... I am alone... so I run away to save myself... [...] if some Irish... pass through the area, they don't do nothing... but because we are foreign people... they fight us... when I tried to explain to the city council or the police... they say: 'These kids... have failed education ... they have bad, bad families... alcoholic people... just try to save yourself!'... that is what they say... 'keep far away from them!' [Ahmad]

The lack of safety has serious gender connotations for Somali women living alone.

Yes, it was very difficult... because the studio I used to live in.... I used to have some neighbours that kind of... go wherever they go... come back home, drunk late at 4 o'clock in the morning... or maybe at 6 or 5 and would play music very loud...and I had to sleep and if I knocked at the wall they could hear me... but they wouldn't care... I used to call the police... but... so I felt I had to move... [Ayaan]

Well... I am not happy... because it is not a safe place... there are lots of alcoholics in the evening... they would knock at the door... it is not a safe place... [...] at night, you can't sleep... because people are knocking at the door... because there is no bell and they would kick the door... and because I am living on the ground floor I can't sleep properly at night... [Faduma]

²⁷ In her qualitative study of Irish people's views of migrants in the Blanchardstown area, Ní Chonail (2009) finds evidence of what Balibar (1991) calls 'crisis racism', whereby migrants are constructed as the root cause of social problems in relation to employment, housing, education, and other social services. This 'crisis racism' – exacerbated by the current economic downturn (see Ní Chonail, 2010) – deflects attention away from the state's failure to provide adequate resources, particularly in relation to social housing, health and recreational facilities.

Housing needs are affected by factors such as age, gender and disability. There is a risk that people – especially women and the elderly – end up home-bound, restricted ‘by custom, concern or necessity’ (Kahin, 1997:39). The lack of family and social networks – often the result of having spent years in direct provision – exacerbates participants’ isolation and loneliness and results in a sense of not-belonging.

the people who are living around the place... they are people from Eastern Europe... and they just say ‘hello, hello’... I have no friendship... there is no neighbour from Somalia in that place... they live far away and most of them are young... teenagers... they go to college and they are very busy themselves... so... I live on my own.. [Sara]

Despite feeling isolated, Sara spoke of her efforts to rebuild an active social life:

I go outside most of the time... because if I stay home I feel lonely and worry... I feel stressed... I always try to go out and meet with the people... now I go to school where I try to learn the language so I meet people also in that place...

A specific area of concern refers to the post-direct provision accommodation needs of refugees with disabilities. Suleiman, co-founder of HAPA, an association which provides support, information and referral services to other Somalis, discussed in section 7, expressed his frustration at the way the case of a blind man leaving direct provision was handled by RIA.

I was involved a little bit when Hassan got the status and looked at the letter he got from RIA... this letters says ‘please leave your centre as soon as possible but no later than the 26 of December’... and he is a blind person... and then they tell him where he should go... he must go to the Council... I went myself... I called Meath County Council... and they told me... he must go to register when he gets the GNIB card ²⁸... he must get... I mean one year in the queue and after that I went back to RIA and said... ‘what can I do now?... and later... after this communication back and forth... they said you have to go to the welfare officer... and he is a blind man [Suleiman]

Thanks to HAPA’s intervention, Hassan was allowed to go on living in Mosney where he is being assisted by his son, who is still awaiting decision on his appeal (after his first application was refused), as he tells:

I have been caring for my father for five years and... I haven’t taken a break for five years... [...] caring for someone... without a brother or a sister or a mother or a relative... helping me... [...] we didn’t get any assistance at all... we went everywhere... hundreds of places... but we didn’t get any assistance... even now... he has his status and still he is not getting any assistance... [Nuradin]

Despite the difficulties outlined above, housing experiences seem to improve with time. One young respondent lived in a bedsit before moving to a big house which she shares with college students from other countries.

²⁸ Anyone who stays in Ireland for more than three months, and is not a citizen of the EU, the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, must register his/her presence in Ireland with An Garda Síochána (the Irish police force). Any changes to the length of one’s stay or status must also be reported to immigration officials. The registration of non-EEA nationals is for border control reasons. Once registered, people are issued with an "Immigration Certificate of Registration", also called ‘GNIB card’. See <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories/moving-country/moving-to-ireland/rights-of-residence-in-ireland/registration-of-non-eea-nationals-in-ireland>

It was very hard [to live by myself]... at least now I have people... to see at night time or at weekend... to chat... and they are different people from me... like... the mentality, I like it... but before I used to go out, shopping and go back to my room... just me... no one else... it was difficult... now I feel... I am much, much better... I used to hate to eat alone; I used to hate to cook alone... [Ayaan]

6.3 Employment

Of the nine people we interviewed only one was in employment (as self-employed). Of the remaining eight, two were not looking for employment due to age and disability, one was a full time student, another was not entitled to work because of his legal status as an asylum seeker, and four were unemployed despite the fact that they had been looking for work for variable periods of time, had refugee status, and sufficient command of English.

European studies note that refugees' struggle to find employment even years after arrival and despite a very high level of independent job-seeking and considerable increase of their human capital in the form of language and labour market skills (Valtonen, 1999). Assessing the situation of refugees in Finland, Valtonen (1999:2) writes that '[t]he waste of human resources, in particular of the expertise of skilled and professional persons, has reached a level that is dysfunctional in the context of societal, as well as individual level integration'. Fangen's study of Somali refugees in Norway (2006:79) also highlights a situation of structural disadvantage evidenced by the fact that 'many respondents use the metaphor of being met by closed doors, in relation to the labour and housing market'. Danso (2001:6) notes very high rates of unemployment and underemployment for Somali refugees in Toronto, symptomatic of very high levels of poverty and deprivation within the community. Omar (2009:58) reports that unemployment among the Somali community in Australia is eight times more than the average. Sporton and Valentine (2007) point out that high unemployment amongst Somali men in Sheffield results in a diminished status in relation to their traditional roles as breadwinners, can lead to family breakups, and negatively impacts on the identity formation processes of Somali boys.

Employment and adequate income are key indicators and conditions for successful settlement in a new country. Work is not only a fundamental means of securing financial stability but it 'has always been central to the way that refugees resumed the everyday rhythms of life and re-established a viable social and family identity' (Summerfield, 2001: 162). All our participants spoke of the importance of securing formal employment to be able to get out of the welfare system and start earning a living independently.

Yes... I am ok financially... but it is not something... you want to work to earn it... it is something... the government helping you... so I always pray for the government... because... if they keep us safe... they give you the money... we have to appreciate for that... but I would like to work... [Faduma]

Faduma is conscious that it may be difficult for her to secure a job as she has a slight disability that does not allow her to stand on her feet for long periods of time. She would like to find a clerical job but she is worried about her spelling and writing skills, which are poor due to the lack of comprehensive schooling in Somalia. At the time of the interview she was taking literacy and computer classes in the hope of becoming better qualified. She had also tried to get some work as a volunteer in charity shops.

The need of securing employment was also linked by other participants to a strong feeling of responsibility toward their families overseas and the wish to help them financially (see Omar, 2009: 74 for similar findings).

Every month... as long as I get some money I keep sending it every month... cause they [my family] don't have income and no one supports them except me [Ahmad]

Although our study is too limited to draw significant generalisations, we found that all participants of working age experienced great difficulties in entering the Irish labour market, due to 'the existence of attitudinal and institutional factors of resistance along the boundaries of the employment market' (Valtonen, 1999:24), the lack of appropriate training or qualifications, and the ubiquitous demand for Irish experience (UNHCR Ireland, 2009).

Rejection at the first gate of the employment market is common to many African migrants (see e.g., Olivia James's study of the difficulties encountered by African women in securing employment since the recession, 2010; for a more general study of discrimination against immigrants in the Irish labour market, see O'Connell and McGinnity, 2008).²⁹ Suleiman who spent a few years living and working in Denmark, moved to Ireland in 2006 attracted by the prospect of a booming economy and Ireland's proximity to the UK (where some of his relatives live). He was confident he could find work in the multi-lingual and IT sector thanks to his work experience, the fact he holds a Danish passport, and speaks two EU languages (English and Danish) fluently:

I was looking at ads ... in 2006 I saw so many jobs available on the internet... in Ireland... and I knew I wouldn't get a job straight away... but I said... well in Europe I have a right to work in every country I want, I am a European national... so many people... even friends from Denmark... they were working in IBM, Dell... they got jobs... so I chatted with them... and I saw 'Danish speaking people... jobs available'... here in Ireland... and I said to myself... why don't I try... and in September 2006 I came here... and then... when I came I looked for a job but I didn't get a job straight away... I filled in applications... first time when I came I went to Jobcare... the recruitment agency... I talked to the people there... I went to the preparation course... to find a job... it was actually a little bit difficult when I found out that.... It is not so easy to find a job... and I spent a while to look for a job... [Suleiman]

Difficulties in accessing employment are also linked to lack of qualifications and formal work experience.

I tried, I tried a lot... but it is very hard to get a job... you don't have any qualification... at the time I ran away [from Somalia] I was too young... I couldn't get some Diploma... or anything... the time we lost the central government in 1991... until... up to now there is no government.... There is no nothing... people fighting each other... running away here and there... so I didn't have an opportunity to study... [in Ireland] I looked for any type of work...[...] I don't have a choice... so as long as I got a job, I was ready to do any type of work... but the first time I applied they asked 'do you have a CV? Do you have qualifications?'... and they said 'we will call you' and they rejected me... they didn't accept me... it was the Adecco recruitment agency [Ahmad]

Ahmad, who is 29, tried to find a job in Ireland for two years before starting a home decoration course in the hope of taking advantage of the still strong construction industry. Now that the sector has all but dried up and thousands of people working in the field have been made redundant, Ahmad is keenly aware that there is little prospect that his newly acquired qualifications would earn him a job.

Other factors affecting opportunities to find employment are linked to being: 1) an older or mature person trying to enter a new labour market; 2) a youth seeking first

²⁹ See also 'Issues and Challenges in the Recruitment and selection of Immigrant Workers in Ireland' (2009), prepared for the Employers' Diversity Network of the Public Appointment Service. http://www.publicjobs.ie/publicjobs/downloads/PAS_diversity_report_Exec_summary_final.pdf

employment; 3) an individual who has only been employed in informal working environments. The latter is the norm for women in war-torn Somalia, especially if there are no male breadwinners in the family.

I used to help my mum... She used to cook sweets and we used to sell the sweets... outside the door of the house... and when my father was there he used to be... he made clothes... he was a tailor... He used to work like that and life was ok... but after that... everything is gone... my father has been killed and... I just used to help my mum to make these sweets... and sell them... [Faduma]

Women may also be refused jobs because of their dress or the dress code of certain employers; religious beliefs may also prevent women from searching employment in certain sectors – like in the food and catering industry (Shih, 2002).

I wouldn't like to work somewhere like in Tesco... or like food shop... or SPAR... because of my religion... you are not allowed to touch alcohol... and they have the ham... that is why I don't go to Tesco to look for a job [Ayaan]

Young people entering the labour market for the first time, with no previous work experience, are at a disadvantage in the current economic climate as outlined by two participants in their early twenties.

I brought my CVs and nobody is calling me... or anything... and I did my Leaving Cert... I update my CV.. it is strange... I brought almost two hundred CVs now... [Ayaan]

When I looked for myself... the honest answer I got today... there are so many young people, they are in their own country.... They have got qualifications... they have got more priority than you... you see?... [Nasir]

Furthermore the absence of an 'ethnic Somali economy' may have inhibited the formation of employment enclaves Somalis may draw upon. Griffiths et al (2006: 894) note that in specific areas of Birmingham and London informal economic networks amongst Somalis 'have been instrumental in promoting business activity [...] This is based around a proliferating number of internet cafés, the *hawilad* system of transfer of remittances to Somalia, and a variety of small shops and restaurants'.

According to Christie (2002), prolonged unemployment and lack of training results in high levels of welfare dependence among refugees and are directly linked to the failure of social service providers to encourage practices and service delivery which are empowering for clients.³⁰ One particularly urgent problem voiced by HAPA is how 'welfare dependency' negatively impacts on young people's career aspirations and ambitions:

We can prevent young people from dropping out of school... [...] because once they drop out it becomes very difficult... because they get into the welfare system... they get rent paid for them... and... they don't have a clue that... the social welfare system is a handicap for young people... I mean... it is not good for anyone... whether adult or young ... for me.. it would be better if it even didn't exist... the system because of... but these young people they do not think about the future... what the future holds for them... [Suleiman]

³⁰ Christie (2002: 188) argues that 'social work in Ireland is developing new ways of constructing asylum seekers and refugees as welfare subjects. These include isolating asylum seekers through providing specialised services and accommodation, and making few efforts to adapt existing mainstream services to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. These new welfare subjects are being maintained at the margins of social citizenship'.

6.4 Education

When Somalia gained independence in 1960 mass education was promoted as a vehicle for national development. In 1972 all private schools were nationalised and free and compulsory primary education was introduced (Kahin, 1997: 19-20). Mass literacy campaign in rural areas (1974) and the inscription of the Somali language resulted in a sharp increase of literacy rates and the number of active primary schools. Despite these improvements, secondary education structures were limited to the main urban centres and were often poorly equipped. Between the late 1980s and during the 1990s literacy rates dropped dramatically to 36% for males and 14% for females as a consequence of the war, mounting violence and starvation: 'virtually 90% of educational institutions and resources, including schools, technical training centres, and university facilities, became casualties in the mass destruction of the country's infrastructure' (Omar, 2009:56). An American journalist reporting from Mogadishu in 1995 described the terrible condition of a once famous teacher training college:

The low-rise, modern looking building of the former college of education is now a displaced persons' camp. The class-rooms and dormitories are full of families, the walls are blackened by cooking fire, the library is a world of dust. Books are piled everywhere on sagging shelves, on toppling heaps, the dust is so deep, that it is as though the desert itself is creeping through the walls burying the books in fine sand (Omar, 2009: 56-7).

Whereas attempts have been made to re-establish primary and secondary education, higher education facilities have almost completely disappeared in Somalia. In Somaliland, the government has opened a number of primary schools and further south UNICEF has tried to re-establish a number of primary schools in the main urban centres. At local level, elders, teachers and parents have set up classes for basic education which operate on a self-help basis. Teachers are in short supply and often work for little or no wages. There is a number of adequately resourced private schools in big towns and Qur'anic schools operated by charities. The situation has deteriorated with the increasing power exerted by Al-Shabaab which has used a distorted and draconian interpretation of religion as the basis for restricting the right to education and instill students with military and religious beliefs. Human Rights Watch reports that Al-Shabaab leaders have warned operating schools against using books provided by UNESCO which are deemed as 'un-Islamic'; furthermore topics such as English and science have been banned in some schools in Southern Somalia (Human Rights Watch, 2010: 27).

According to our participants the major rewards of living in Ireland are the feeling of security and the possibility of availing of educational and training opportunities. Education is seen as the route to achieving independence and self-reliance and to building a successful career (Goodman, 2004: 1191). Participants are also appreciative of the opportunities for social interaction that school provides:

It was really good being in school... because.... the only people that I had at the moment were my classmates....Because my family is still in Africa... [Ayaan]

However young participants spoke of having encountered serious difficulties in adapting to the Irish school system and learning 'academic' English, partly related to their lack of formal schooling in Somalia. They admitted they only attended schools intermittently and for a few years: one participant was tutored at home by a private teacher and another was taught at home by her father.

My father used to teach us... because he studied... so he taught us to read and write and English as well, at home... but I was the only one interested in English... I don't know why... [Ayaan]

According to the Trinity Immigration Initiative's English Language Support Programme, 'it is estimated that there are currently some 18,000 primary pupils and 8,000 post-primary students whose first language is neither English nor Irish. These figures are expected to increase in the coming years. Failure to provide non-English-speaking pupils and students with access to mainstream educational opportunities will bring social problems whose seriousness cannot be overestimated' (www.tcd.ie/immigration/english). Recent cuts in language support teacher positions have made assistance to refugee children even less accessible.

The young people we interviewed who attended secondary school in Ireland stated they received limited formal assistance to settle into the Irish education system, although they spoke only a few words of English when they arrived and had to catch up with the curriculum. One respondent felt that the level of English language support currently provided at secondary level is inadequate and that extra hours of tuition should be added.

Yes...I should be given the extra help... because I am not like the other Irish students... because it is their first language... they understand everything... but for me... sometimes the teacher is explaining something... and I am not following... I don't understand very well..... [Ayaan]

Participants talked about being unable to understand what the teacher was saying and struggling with the challenge of writing academically.

I really like the subject... it is easy but... again... it is hard really... when you are doing an assignment... last Friday we had to do six assignments...I was like... crazy... some of them, you have to write them... I don't even have that English... you need to have that English to write them... I don't know what to do... but I tried... let's just try something... so I did something... so I did five assignments... because if you don't submit exactly on that deadline... you are going to lose it... [Ilhan]

Participants were generally aware of their educational disadvantage.

The first thing... English is not our first language... if we can get some help... some times when you are doing some essay or you have to talk about facts... sometimes when English is not your first language, you may find this hard... or sometimes when the teacher is explaining something... sometimes you feel like... you can't stop her all the time and ask: 'oh, can you explain this again?'... you can't stop her [and ask] 'oh, what does this mean, what does this mean?'... but sometimes... they have to explain to them [pupils]: 'you have got a right to ask the teacher'... like... it is not something I have to feel ashamed of... 'oh, I didn't understand and I just get my books and go back home and I can't do things'... if they can get help... it is going to be big help for us... [Nasir]

Another issue which emerged during the interview was the lack of familiarity with the curriculum, how the Irish school system is structured and the need for career guidance to help pupils to make well-informed choices.

I started Leaving Cert applied... but after one year I didn't like it... I thought I needed to learn geography and science while in the Leaving Cert Applied you are only learning office skills... stuff like that... so after one year I asked my teachers if I could change to the Leaving Cert... the normal one...and they said it was ok... so I changed [Ilhan]

Moreover, Somalis who arrived to Ireland as unaccompanied minors find it extremely difficult to perform according to their potential. According to HAPA, some Somali boys and girls are struggling in school and college because they lack parental support, often do not

have adequate space for homework and study (discussed in section 7) and have to endure the added pressure caused by calls for assistance from family members.

Ayaan, who arrived to Ireland as an unaccompanied minor, found studying and preparing for her Leaving Certificate – while juggling domestic responsibilities – particularly challenging:

Because you have lots to do... I was doing six subjects... every teacher gives you some new work to do... and maybe you have different tests... biology test, or geography test... and maybe in two days you have two tests or three... and then you have to go shopping and buy food... clean your house... you have things to do... for me it was difficult... I found it very difficult... but I was like... I have to do this... because I wanted to have a certificate... [Ayaan]

Remedial education for refugee children who lack sufficient command of English is inadequate and is not carried out in the mother tongue. The lack of mother tongue instruction in school is also problematic.³¹ To address these issues HAPA has set up a homework club in Dublin which runs twice a week after school hours and offers support in core subjects such as English, Maths, Science, Chemistry etc (see section 7).

In general participants value the educational opportunities Ireland has offered them and harbor high career aspirations (see Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002 and Oikonomidou, 2009). When asked about their aspirations and dreams beyond school, two participants spoke of their future careers not in terms of individualistic achievements but as a means to support 'their people'. According to Oikonomidou (2009: 33), such professional aspirations point at an 'inherent contradiction' between deploring the violence and political chaos of Somalia and expressing a desire to return, which is reflective of young people's 'struggles to make meaning of their lives in transition'. Ilhan, who is currently studying International Aid and Development, said:

As I come from Somalia and there is a war... and every time you see people who work for refugee people... they come to Somalia and they support people, they help people... I found it interesting because I want to do something like that... for my people... and for other people to help them... I would like to go back... but not now... when it is safe... when there is no war... [Ilhan]

Despite being strongly academically oriented, participants expressed frustration in relation to the financial difficulties of accessing third level education. Although people with refugee status do not have to pay college fees, they are at risk of losing welfare entitlements if they enter full time education. While this also applies to students of Irish nationality, many young refugees often lack family and support networks, which may provide financial help, and they encounter greater barriers, compared to white Irish peers, in securing part-time jobs as discussed above.

Yes... I wanted to continue... I even filled out the CAO form... I was planning to study business management... and the National College contacted me... but I couldn't go... because ... when I told the people that pay my rent and stuff... they said 'if you want to go to third level education you need to find a job'... I was getting social welfare... they were paying for my rent and food... they still do because I haven't found a job... during the summer I started to look for a job and I didn't get any so I get back to them and said... I can't find a job... and I really need to step forward for my course... and the college was sending me letters... when are you coming to college?... are you interested to come and take a tour of the college?' but I

³¹ In Finland Somali pupils received two hours weekly tuition in Somali language and also attended an additional grade in order to build a stronger academic base before accessing third level education (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002: 281).

didn't go because of this... most of my friends have started... because they have their family here... so they don't mind to live in the family house... but it would be hard for me if I left my flat... I feel I don't have anywhere to go... [Ayaan]

For young Somalis who arrived as separated minors, the prolonged lack of parental guidance and support has consequences on how they are able to plan their future career and academic choices (Omar, 2009: 72). Young Somalis are also disproportionately at risk of dropping out of school or putting their academic dreams on hold and looking for employment to support their families back home. The first time we met Ayaan, she had just finished her Leaving Certificate. She was satisfied with her results and looked forward to starting a Business Management course. She was also looking for a part-time job in a clothes shop and she seemed optimistic about her future. We met a couple of months later and talked again about her career plans. This time she was unsure about what to do and whether to continue her studies as her application for family reunification was still pending. She was considering abandoning the idea of going to college and looking for full time employment to continue assisting her family. She has since changed her mind and is committed to starting college in September 2010. She still sends money home on a regular basis.

6.5 The young generation

When I was in Somalia I wasn't doing all this stuff... but now... you have to do it, because this is the kind of experience you need to have... [Ilhan]

According to the UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2008, approximately half of the estimated number of refugees worldwide are children (2008: 53).

Between 2002 and 2008, approximately 2-3% of the total applications for asylum in Ireland were made by unaccompanied minors (Joyce and Quinn, 2009; see table 4 below).

Table 4: Asylum applications made by unaccompanied minors 2002-2008

Year application was received	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Asylum application made by unaccompanied minors	288	271	128	131	131	94	98
Total asylum applications	11,634	7,900	4,766	4,323	4,314	3,985	3,866
Applications made by UAMs as % of total applications	2.5	3.4	2.7	3.0	3.0	2.4	2.5

(Source: Joyce and Quinn, 2009:12)

Unaccompanied minors from Somalia were amongst the top ten nationalities in 2002 (12 applications), 2003 (21), 2004 (13), 2005 (31), 2006 (22), 2007 (15), 2008, (less than 10).

Separated³² children and adolescents arriving in Ireland face many challenges in terms of overcoming social isolation, language barriers, discrimination and racism, without family support. In addition they have to live with the anxiety of possible deportation, and uncertainty about what the future holds (Goodman, 2004; Ressler et al. 1988; Rousseau et

³² We use the words 'separated' and 'unaccompanied' interchangeably. It is important to note though that according to the *Statement of Good Practice for Separated Children in Europe*, issued by Save the Children and the UNHCR in 2000, the word 'separated' is preferred as 'it better defines the essential problems that such children face without the care and protection of their parents or legal guardian' (IRIN, 2003: 8)

al, 1998; Sourander, 1998). For young asylum seekers and refugees the 'unsettling experience' of forced mobility 'is compounded by disempowerment across different spheres (material possessions, cultural and social capital) and by the provisional and uncertain nature of mobility' (Sporton et al, 2006: 211). Even young people who have successfully overcome the initial hurdles of arrival and secured their right to remain in a safe country 'may continue to grapple with dilemmas rooted in a broken social world – disrupted trajectories, loss of status and cultural alienation' (Summerfield, 2001: 162).

The adaptation experiences of asylum seeker and refugee youth in Ireland are poorly understood and have received scant attention from both statutory bodies and scholarly literature (but see Gilligan et al. 2010; Ní Laoire et al, 2009; Viriri, 2010). Ní Laoire et al argue that policy approaches in Ireland 'tend to focus on meeting migrant children's and young people's basic needs [...] This means that migrant children's wider needs are absent in many key policy areas which impact on their lives. For example...*Migration Nation* (Lenihan, 2008) does not mention children or young people at all (although education is mentioned)' (2009: 19). The situation of refugee and asylum seeker young adults (over 18), who technically are no longer under the remit of the HSE, is even less known.³³

Three of the nine Somalis who took part in this study arrived in Ireland as unaccompanied minors. One is now 19 years old and the other two are 21 and 22 respectively. They have all been granted refugee status and have lived and studied in Dublin since their arrival. One participant is now attending her first year in college; another is completing his Leaving Certificate and the third is hoping to start college in September 2010. All three live alone and have no family here. None have yet succeeded in reuniting with their families (see section 6.6). This section focuses on their specific narratives and experiences to highlight both the issues that complicate adjustment for young people and the resources they mobilise to fulfill their needs and pursue their goals (Ryan et al, 2008).

Young participants spoke of their journey and the traumas associated with forced migration. While still in Somalia they had witnessed violence and had lived in fear for their physical safety.

We just found it hard... because of safety... at that time I was just like... the more you get older, the more you have to be careful about going out... because anything can happen to you in Somalia because it is not a safe place... when you are seven, eight it is ok..... but when you are ten, eleven or twelve, thirteen... that is the time you have to be careful... because anything can happen, they can rape you... they can take you... and then you have to work in the house... they can do a lot of things to you so you have to stay at home...[Ilhan]

Thank God that I left Somalia... and my family left Somalia as well... because it is really bad... what is happening there... they just... sometimes they come with big gun machines and the whole family can die together in one time... it is really... I didn't like it... I remember one time this woman, our neighbour... and it was in the morning...she came to visit us and... when the woman was in the middle of our house... in our room... the bullet came and hit her and she died there... in our house... imagine... it was really hard... you see bad things... many things you wouldn't like to see... but you can't help...[Ayaan]

³³ Minors who arrive in Ireland without their parents to claim asylum are in state care and are dealt with by the Health Service Executive (HSE). In accordance with the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) and the Child Care Act, 1991, the HSE has the responsibility of attending to the immediate and ongoing needs of separated children seeking asylum relating to accommodation, medical and social needs and to support them through the application process (see Joyce and Quinn, 2009)

Upon arrival in Ireland they experienced a sense of acute displacement and vulnerability: faced with a new environment, cold weather, different food, and unable to communicate in English, they felt emotionally overwhelmed.

I don't know... the first time when I came they just put me in hotel... and I didn't know... in two weeks I was just crying because I didn't know exactly what to eat... there was food but I didn't know the food... [...] I didn't know... most of the people there... there were only girls there in that hostel.. they were from different countries and then... there was no one who could speak my language and my English was really small... but I was trying... they were asking what is my name... where I come from in Somalia... but that first week I was crying constantly because it was new to me and I didn't know what to do... and I was feeling like I was in prison... I thought I couldn't go out because I didn't know... [Ilhan]

Going through the asylum process was confusing and at times profoundly upsetting, contributing to one's feelings of disempowerment and lack of control.

It was trouble... it was trouble... because... you don't even know whether you have got rights or not... and no one was explaining it to you... [Nasir]

Despite initial difficulties, they felt they had adjusted well to the new environment, and were satisfied with their achievements (like learning a new language, succeeding in school, and making new friends). They were all highly appreciative of the safety and educational opportunities Ireland offered and glad they had made the journey:

I thought Europe was... exactly the way it is... a place where you can study... you can go freely... you can do whatever you want... this is exactly what I thought... this is exactly what I was expecting... not like in Somalia... when you are sleeping there... you can hear the sound of the bullets... but here you can go to sleep safely and you get up safely... you won't hear anything... you can go to college for free... these are things... and thank God... that I was expecting.. [Ilhan]

Being granted refugee status in a safe country is understood as life-changing:

I was really happy... because when I applied [for refugee status]... I didn't know what it was... but they said: 'if you get this thing... you can do everything... you can do this and that'... so... I was waiting.... And when I got it I was really happy...I was very happy...[Ilhan]

Despite displaying great resilience, autonomy and self-reliance, participants spoke of 'feeling alone', and lamented that they knew few people they could rely on for advice and guidance (apart from Somali friends in the same age group, who often have to cope with similar circumstances).

I like it [Ireland] but I am lonely... the only thing... when you don't have family, it is really hard... there are friends but... it is different... that is the only thing... I am fine...God blessed... everything I know... I know the weather, I know the place... I know the people... I know Ayaan... I know the system of Ireland... so... to be honest I really like it but sometimes it is hard... it is good, honestly... but sometimes it is hard... because you are on your own... when you come from school... I have to go to Lucan and cook for myself... I have to do these things for myself... I have to think about myself and even for my mum... and that is what all of us are doing... when we come to Ireland we have to take care of ourselves and then we have to take care of the people you left there...[Ilhan]

Our study identified the lack of targeted support systems for young refugees who have turned 18, and are no longer under the legal responsibility of the HSE. Although aftercare services for aged-out minors are available, many young refugees do not know about them or choose not to avail of them, as Suleiman Abdulahi of HAPA outlines:

These young people... they are living in the care house... and when they become 18 years old they go to live on their own... I mean there is help for them but they don't know... there are aftercare services... there are plans... there is somebody following them after they move from the care house... but what happens with these young people is that they just move... and rent private accommodation... and it is difficult for them... because... they don't speak English and they don't have skills at all...

After leaving the care of the HSE, one participant struggled with the demands of living independently and had to learn a whole array of survival skills:

I was in hospital all the time... because... I hated to eat alone that I ended up not to eat... sometimes it was my ulcer... it was the first time for me to cook food and... I didn't know how to cook food very well... because back home... my sisters used to prepare food... and I didn't bother learning... and even when I came here, in the hostel there was someone cooking... so when I moved to my own place I found it very difficult... [Ayaan]

Another issue participants raised is the limited access to recreational activities (because of language barriers, lack of knowledge, transportation costs and cultural factors) and the lack of communal spaces for Somali youth. The main leisure pursuits are thus informal visits to the homes of friends, Eid and other festivities, occasional Somali one-off social events (see also Kahin, 1997: 41). The mosque is also important in affirming one's religious and social identities, albeit primarily for young men.

While Somali boys and young men are very involved in football (tournaments and informal training sessions are organised regularly), adolescent girls have fewer opportunities for socialising outdoor due to the lack of infrastructure, cultural factors and concerns around one's safety. Ilhan said:

What do I like to do in my spare time?... there is nothing really... I like running but I don't run, to be honest... I don't know... at night I am scared... because you hear sometimes that someone has killed someone... so at night... someone who is just running... if they catch me... and kill me... I am scared because... I am by myself... so I don't do that... but I talk to my friends... they call me and they tell me... come around... or they come to my house...

Friendships and peer networks are of great importance for young Somalis: they constitute a support structure young people can rely on when they face problems or want to share positive experiences. While participants mentioned having non-Somali friends, they said they spend most of their free time with other Somalis. Ethnic peer networks are strong and charged with positive emotions; however young Somalis living on their own may experience very specific forms of exclusion compared with Somalis living in 'traditional' households including, in some cases, being stigmatised by adults as a 'bad influence' on their peers.

Actually those [Somalis] who are living with their families, I don't go to their houses because their mothers are there and their fathers... and maybe they don't like to see their children with some other children... they think you are not a nice person because you live on your own... it is not my fault... but they don't like you to come and hang out with their children... they think you are a bad person or maybe you go to bad places or maybe you have bad friends... which I don't.... but... maybe they have their own reasons... but mostly those ones who have families I meet them in the city, I

have a coffee... and talk and then... that's it... most of the time... I go to the girls [she is referring to her Somali closest girlfriends who, like her, have no family in Ireland] and they would be alone in their houses ... because I feel we are in the same situation... and they are alone as well... and I am alone... and we go to their places or mine and we spend the day and night together... to cook together, eat together and chat... [Ayaan]

One participant highlighted the lack of role models young people can look up to. Absence of youth-led projects and mentoring initiatives involving Somalis may result in low self-esteem and aspirations.

I think if they will get someone to stand for them... so that they know whether they are doing right or not... I think it would be helpful for them... the way I see it now.. they haven't got much ambition ... they don't think like... 'you can do it'... but if someone can do it... you can do it of course... they need someone to advise them..[Nasir]

The same participant also spoke of a widespread sense of 'lack of opportunities' amongst young male Somalis which increases their perception of not having a stake in their own future.

When you look at the other young Somali people who are here and they haven't been given the opportunity and you may think... oh, you won't try this thing... because of all the people that before you are here and still they haven't done anything and they haven't been given the opportunity and when you ask them... no one will give you that opportunity ... so sometimes... they bring you down, these things... so you have to try and move on... you know... because... I mean... when you look at other people and you may think, the people before you here, they are just sitting and doing nothing... and the reason is... because they haven't try to do something or..? because they haven't been given any opportunity... sometimes you feel a bit helpless...or maybe Irish people are different from other people as well... but at least I am trying to do something.. I am trying... [Nasir]

Young participants said they keep regular contact with their family members and send between 150-200 US dollars every month to help paying rent, bills and medical care (see Horst, 2008, on the role of remittances in the Somali diaspora). Although they gladly take on this responsibility, knowing the difficult conditions in which their families live, they find it hard to cope with the pressure of demands that may exceed their financial and emotional resources.

My family... they live in a small room... they don't live in a house or a flat... it is a small room and they cook outside... the food... and the toilet... they share it with 50 people... 50 people sharing the toilet... I know, it is hard... but I cannot rent for them a house or... you know... [...] this is difficult for me and I told them..... this is all I can, I understand it is difficult for them... but this is all I can... at times I feel I need to buy more clothes...it is winter and the weather is changing... I need to buy a jacket or shoes... for the winter and in the summertime maybe I need to buy some different clothes... and I don't go to the shops... I don't even remember... when I last went shopping to buy clothes... [Ayaan]

Yes.. sometimes.... really, sometimes it is hard... sometimes you may need the money... sometimes you don't have it... you are young, so you spend the money... and then you don't know how to send the money... so you have to be careful... but again... it is ok, really because my mum is living with family... it is all right...[Ilhan]

Scarce financial resources coupled with the obligation to send remittances means that young Somali refugees have little or no money to spend on social and recreational pursuits which other young people engage in:

Sometimes I get invited to parties... and I just don't go because... I don't have make-up... nice clothes... so I think like... if I haven't nice clothes... I feel like I don't want to go... but I am happy, I am not saying I am not happy... I am happy that I am sending money... that instead of buying shoes I am helping my family... I am very happy... so I don't mind even if I don't go to a club or partying... you know... if my family are happy, I am happy... [Ayaan]

Young participants also mentioned experiencing discrimination and racism, although they tended to minimise their importance or brush them off as motivated by individual prejudice or drunken behavior (see section 3.2 and Ní Laoire et al, 2009).³⁴

Most of them [people in Ireland] I find them nice... good people... 99%... they are good... sometimes... I used to play basketball with my friend, a Somali girl... not far from where we used to live... the hostel... and one day... a man... he was kind of drunk person... he was telling us to go back to America... we are not even from America...but he thought that because we are black and we are playing basketball... he imagined we are from America ... he was saying 'hey, hey go back to America'... we didn't give him much attention, we kept playing basketball... [Ayaan]

Despite the serious challenges they face, the young people we interviewed displayed incredible resilience, capabilities and strong will to succeed and make a contribution (see Kohli, 2006). Their stories attest to resourcefulness and creativity:

You know... when you have problems... you need to get some experience... problems will give you experience... you have to be more open... you have to be everything... I didn't believe when I was In Somalia that I can live alone... that I can live without my mum or that I can take care of myself... or that I can take care of my mum... and even that I can go to school and nobody is helping... in the morning you have to get up and go to college... for yourself, because.. what can I do?... [Ilhan]

Such strengths and adaptability are resources that need to be nurtured by supporting young people's educational and career efforts. Providing opportunities will undoubtedly result in long-term dividends both for individuals and for Irish society. Writing in *The Irish Times*, Catherine Reilly (2010a) reports many success stories from 'generation hostel', one involving a nineteen-year-old Somali seeking asylum who managed to pay his college fees after he won an award for a road-safety device he designed.³⁵

6.6 Family reunification

'The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law' (Bunreacht Na hEireann, Article 41 (1)).

³⁴ Young people are also forced to grapple with public discourses around asylum seekers and refugees (Pratt and Valverde, 2002). Lynn and Lee (2003) argue that specific forms of racism targeting asylum seekers and refugees can deeply affect young people's identity formation and practices.

³⁵ <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/features/2010/0507/1224269861202.html>

Rebuilding family and social networks, fractured by forced migration, is central to refugees' successful settlement in terms of emotional, financial and social well being. Refugee literature highlights 'the pivotal role of family and social networks in providing support and nurturing problem-solving strategies' (Summerfield, 2001:162). A study of life satisfaction, anxiety and depression among Somali men in London (McMichael and Manderson, 2004) found that family support provides the main buffer mechanism against depression and anxiety caused by loneliness, inadequate access to community services, displacement and disability. The study concluded that '[t]he lowest level of distress were found in Somalis who felt supported by their families' (ibid: 89).

Under section 18 of the Refugee Act (as amended) persons who have been granted refugee status are entitled to apply for family reunification. A refugee is entitled to be joined by a spouse, minor dependent children under 18, and parents if the refugee is aged under 18. Refugees can also apply for other dependent family members. However such applications are considered on a case-by-case basis. While people who have been granted 'leave to remain' do not have a right based in law to family reunification, they may apply to have their immediate family members (spouse and minor children) to join them. Applications must provide evidence that the applicant can support family members financially and all decisions are subjected to the discretion of the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.³⁶ There is no system of independent appeal for refugees whose applications to be reunited with their family in Ireland have been refused. Refugees' entitlements to family life, endorsed in existing legislation, are *de facto* restricted by a numbers of factors such as long waiting periods, unclear definition of 'family members', and how the merits of individual cases are determined. This raises questions concerning the Irish State's commitment to protecting the 'inalienable and imprescriptible' rights of the family asserted in article 41 of the Constitution cited above.

Applying for family reunification is a complex and lengthy process and refugees may have to wait years before their family members are able to join them. Difficulties relate primarily to the amount of evidence (e.g., passports, birth and marriage certificates etc) that must be provided by the applicant, and to the fact that the Minister has full power of discretion in deciding whether to accept or deny an application. Furthermore, processing times are much longer in Ireland than in other EU member states, despite the fact that the number of applications is lower than the EU average (Moran, 2009).³⁷ The way the Department of Justice has dealt with applications has been publicly criticised for its 'lack of transparency, clarity and accessible information' (Kenny, 2008) following a case in which it failed for three years to notify a Somali refugee that her family could join her in Ireland.

All our participants fled Somalia leaving their families behind. Four of them have applied for family reunification and are awaiting decision on their cases. Two other participants with leave to remain in Ireland had their applications rejected. Prolonged separation from spouses, parents and children is causing enormous distress, anxiety and depression to the individuals living here and to their families. Furthermore it appears from the interviews that family reunification procedures systematically marginalise the perspective of the refugee as a bearer of rights, with decisions depending largely 'on the balancing of states' interest in immigration control' against individuals' claims (Mullally, 2006: 579).³⁸

Young people, especially, feel overwhelmed and burnt-out by legal hurdles. Ayaan arrived in Ireland in 2005 when she was 17. She left her father and five siblings in Somalia. She applied for family reunification in 2006.

³⁶ see: http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Family_Reunification_Information_Leaflet#1

³⁷ In Ireland refugee reunification requests are processed on average in two years to 30 months, compared to an average of six to 12 months in Portugal, Germany, Malta and the United Kingdom (Moran, 2009).

³⁸ Refugees' right to family reunification needs to be understood in the context of the significant changes in the laws regulating citizenship in Ireland especially after the 2004 citizenship referendum. Mullally (2006: 579) argues that such changes defend a 'state-centred view on the limits and scope of fundamental rights' and that an 'exclusionary impulse has guided, or misguided, legislative and judicial responses to the claims made by migrant families in Ireland'.

Yes, in the beginning there was someone who helped me... actually in the beginning I even didn't know how to apply... but some lady called C. helped me and I applied... and they asked me a lot of things... a lot of things to bring and I was in and out of hospital, I was doing my Leaving Cert... they asked me to bring passports for my family... I didn't know how to find the passports... I didn't know if there is a 'Somali passport'... and after that... I saw some Somali doing it and I asked them... to explain to me how... but after that... I got the passports and all the stuff they needed.. and they refused me one time... just because I didn't bring everything that they asked... but they don't understand because it was too much for me... but I got now a lawyer... and we got all the passports and all the things and she said 'it is not fair that after three years you get a negative response'... and now they said: 'ok... we can look at your case again'...but - they said, you need to do a DNA test to see whether I am related to these people or not... so now I am waiting for the DNA test... [Ayaan]

In the beginning of 2010 she was informed that only her father had been granted right to join her. Ayaan has been profoundly upset since she received the news. She cannot see how her father, who is the only parent left, could leave the rest of the family to join her. She is also sadly incredulous that her brother's mental health issues were not taken into consideration.

Another young participant applied for her mother to join her in Ireland. She has not seen her in four years. She described the process of providing documentation and evidence of 'relatedness' as energy consuming and harrowing:

Oh, my God... that was really... in my life... I have never... I was in war... I was born somewhere in war... sometimes you have nothing to eat... you are not safe... but I have never seen in my life something like this... to be honest... because... now I am more mature... I can understand... I can feel more... but now... I am ok... I got used to it... I am ok...[Ilhan]

Ahmad arrived in Ireland to claim asylum in 2004. His wife and daughter, his mother, brothers, and one sister were still living in Mogadishu when he left but they eventually moved to Ethiopia to escape violence. In 2005, after he received his refugee status, he applied for his family to join him.

I haven't seen them since I came here... in 2004... I applied for my family reunification... in August 2005.... And they refused me... some details... they said: 'if you don't get some evidence they are your family'...like passports, birth certificate...but at the time we lost our central government, in 1991... we lost everything... we lost lives... what about a piece of paper?... I lost all my documents there, at the time of civil war... so they don't accept that and they said: 'you have to have documents..' and bla bla... I tried to contact the embassy in Ethiopia and they sent me some... some passports and some birth certificates... and then I bring them here and they said 'we don't trust these..' bla, bla... they gave me rejection... and I got a lawyer.... paid some money... we got to Court and now I am waiting for DNA... they said 'we need to prove it is your family..' [Ahmad]

The obstacles young and adult refugees encounter in matters related to family reunification have fundamental repercussions on their economic and psychological well being and on the complex, intimate dynamics of family life. Participants felt powerless and overwhelmed by their responsibilities towards those left behind. Such responsibilities are often compounded by family members' idealised notions (Rousseau et al, 2004: 1095) about the host country:

You know... they [my family] think... there is something I can do, but there is nothing I can do.. all the time I explained to them it is not...[my] fault... I tried, I tried... they

see some other families... they are lucky... I call them lucky because they get... some of them just like that... for others it is very hard...I don't know... I can't explain it to them... when they see some people... maybe they stayed one year... one year and half... and they go in Ireland... and I am here more than four years... they say 'why me?'... 'why do they ['lucky' people] end up having their families...? So you are not doing well or what? Did you just forget about us?'... but I cannot answer these questions... it is very hard to answer [Ahmad]

Some participants said that long processing times and uncertainty around the outcomes of their applications were putting strain on their families, already broken and disrupted by war and displacement. What is seen as a failure to fulfill family obligations can cause tension and even family break-ups:

My twin sister... she seems like she is fed-up... my father is not well and my brother has got mental health problems.. and she says it is too much for her and she thinks... I am in a beautiful place... and in a good mood all the time... she is the one who has the problems all the time... but it is not like that... [...] she complains... and I tell her to calm down... because there is nothing I can do... because even if I go back there... the things are going to get worse... nothing is going to get better, because now I am at least sending some money... it is not enough... but if I was going there... imagine... there is no job in Africa... how would life be? She doesn't understand...she thinks I am just enjoying... no problems at all... but it is not true...[Ayaan]

Ahmad has lost contact with his wife after she ran away with their daughter in an attempt to reach Europe by herself:

My wife ran away... she was in Ethiopia.. she said: 'you are just helping your brothers, you don't want to help me'... and I said: 'it is not my choice... I just applied and I paid money for a lawyer but they don't allow me to bring you here and they say... wait, wait, wait' so... she just tried to get to Italy the way my two brothers got there... by boat...and through that long, risk journey... through the desert... [Ahmad]

Unlike people with refugee status, people who have been granted Leave to Remain do not have a law-based right to family reunification.³⁹

Faduma came to Ireland to seek asylum in 2004 and was granted Humanitarian Leave to Remain in 2008. After she received permission to stay, she travelled to South Africa where she got married to her longtime boyfriend. She had lost contact with him due to the chaos in Somalia, and only found out that he was still alive through a Somali friend living in the UK. Unfortunately because of her status she cannot apply to have her husband join her in Ireland.

He is still there... but the thing is... it is difficult because... I can't bring him to Ireland... he can't come and live with me because... of my Leave to Remain... it is just for me...it is not like that you can bring your family... or your husband... you can't... so that is another tragedy again... I didn't know that actually before I got married... so... that's the thing... I have now difficulties... I have a husband... he is

³⁹ 'Leave to Remain' is a status that can be granted by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to persons who have been refused a declaration as a refugee and who are not returned home for humanitarian or other compelling reasons and have made representations under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999. Leave to remain is granted at the discretion of the Minister, usually on humanitarian grounds. (<http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories/moving-country/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/refugee-status-and-leave-to-remain/leave-to-remain>)

there.. I need to have kids... I need him to help me... but again it is difficult to bring him to Ireland... [Faduma]

Sara, a 70 years old Somali woman, arrived in Ireland in 2003. After having spent five years in direct provision she was granted Leave to Remain. She left her daughters and sons in Somalia and two grandchildren she was taking care of, after her son was killed. She regards Ireland as a safe and quiet place but she is also saddened by prolonged separation from her family. She is aware that under the current legislation, there is little chance her application for family reunification will be granted.

First of all... the status I got... I am appreciating... for the Irish authorities to help me and give me some form of status... second... the status I got is not... it is Leave to Remain... and I cannot travel where I want to travel... I cannot bring... family... I cannot apply for my children... my children.. I applied... first when I got the papers... I thought I could have...and then I got the negative... for family reunification... and that is something very negative for me... because I was not expecting it... and they said... you have no rights to apply for family reunification with this document... this status... Leave to Remain... or what they call it... temporary permission... it is not... I have no rights at all to family reunification [Sara]

The fate and living conditions of family members left behind are a matter of concern for all the people interviewed:

They live in a small room... they don't live in a house or a flat... they live like... they told me... it is a small room and they cook outside... the food... and the toilet... they share it with 50 people... 50 people sharing the toilet... I know, it is hard... but I cannot rent for them a house or... you know [Ayaan]

Constant worrying over family and relatives impact on individuals' sense of belonging, security and stability: that is why family reunification processes - lengthy and not informed by a human rights perspective - are utterly detrimental to the integration process.

My father now is old... and if he gets sick... and I am worrying too much... maybe I won't see my father again... and if something happens... I have to find money... and ask my friends and borrow some money and send it to them... and make sure that he is ok and that they take him to the doctor... and take medication [Ayaan]

All participants said they felt lonely and isolated without their families. Isolation and anxiety are further compounded by the lack or limited nature of social support circles and by social marginalisation due to unemployment and other factors. Especially in the case of young refugees, being joined by their families would lighten the burden of responsibilities and allow them to focus on their life projects.

First of all... you wouldn't be alone, in the way we are... and you have your family so you don't have to worry about... sometimes it is difficult for me to send them money...actually sometimes... I cannot even buy what I want because I feel I am a mother or something [...] it wouldn't be my sole responsibility if they come... [Ayaan]

7. HAPA – A migrant-led response

Our goal is to set up a place... not only to support refugees living in Ireland... the dream is to set up an overseas... support also back home... to support education, hospitals (Suleiman Abdulahi)

The importance of migrant and refugee associations in facilitating resettlement and long-term integration has been well documented in the literature (Rex et al, 1987; Griffiths, 2002; Griffiths et al, 2006). The existence of community-based organisations ‘can enhance a sense of belonging among new settlers and provide them with resources, addressing immediate concerns for housing and employment’ (McMichael and Manderson, 2004: 88). Associations are also important in ‘empowering’ refugees and asylum seekers: ‘alleviating “boredom and depression” and in overcoming discrimination or insensitivity in the provision of statutory services’ (Griffiths, 2000: 282). The presence of a strong and efficient community infrastructure is not only central to the development of self-reliance and community resources but also facilitates the formation of bridging networks between refugees and structures of the host society (Werbner, 1991).

Formal associations are not alone in providing assistance and a diverse range of resettlement and advice services: in fact most migrants and refugees rely on personal and informal networks for sourcing information on employment, accommodation, and legal issues (Griffiths et al, 2006). Strong social networks create ‘niches and sheltered spheres of activity and experience, practical and symbolic’ which are fundamental to individuals’ sense of ‘belonging’ (McMichael and Manderson, 2004: 88). The crucial role of migrant-led associations and networks in Ireland was documented by the TII’s Migrant Networks Project (see also De Tona and Lentin, 2010).

According to our participants, Somalis in Ireland have developed strong informal networks which, among other things, establish relationships of reciprocity and trust amongst individuals, provide a safety net for people in need, offer a conduit for sharing information and gossip, and engender a sense of ‘community’ and ‘cultural continuity’.

I spend time with other Somalis... because they are from my country... you know... we understand the language together...and sometimes you feel like... you are at home... just go and eat with them... your traditional food... and make your food there... I feel happy... just remember you are Somali [Faduma]

Typically the salience of informal networks amongst Somalis becomes visible in situations of need (like sickness or legal hurdles) or around social events like celebrations or festivities.

You know the thing is... when we meet each other... at a party or at a wedding... we ask the names and we come together... ‘where do you live?’ I tell them where I am living... we just take telephones numbers... we are very close... and if somebody is ill we go to the hospital... all of us... we go there... like if somebody is sick... even if you don’t know the person, but you have heard... ‘oh, this is the lady who is in the hospital’... we will go all of us in the hospital... like a family... because we are very few... in Ireland... so we will go there and see the person... because some people are lonely here... you are not back home... and you are alone, and when you are in the hospital... you can feel depressed...and we go there all of us... now I know lots of girls... [Faduma]

We found some Somalis in the city... we just greeted them and told them... ‘these papers we don’t know how to fill them’... and they helped us... they told us to go back to the centre... that they would come back in two days... they said they were going to find somebody to help us... there was a man living here at the time... and there was a

lady who arranged help for us to fill in the forms... and that man came and helped us... [Faduma]

Because the number of Somalis living in Ireland is relatively small, they lack the resource base of larger communities and thus have more difficulties in engaging in formal organisational activities or mobilising resources for setting up associations. Despite these limitations, some Somalis managed to establish community groups and initiatives. There is a handful of associations, run by volunteers, which offer support and organise social activities and events (see Bracken, 2008): the *Somali Community Ireland*, with branches in Dublin and other cities; the *Somali Society Ireland*; the *Somali Centre*; the *Somali Youth in Ireland* (which also has a Facebook group), and the *Horn of Africa's People Aid* (HAPA). In this section, based on extensive interviews with Suleiman Abdulahi (see also appendix), we focus solely on the work of HAPA, to highlight how migrant and refugee-led initiatives have the potential to successfully address specific needs, unmet or unrecognised by mainstream services.

HAPA was set up in 2006 by a group of volunteers from Somalia and other Horn of Africa regions 'to assist and support communities in need regardless of their race, religion, colour, gender or social background' (www.hapa.ie). The association provides support, information, referral, interpreting and translation services for refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa. Formerly based at Cairde in Dublin 1, HAPA has moved to premises in Lower Abbey Street. Since its inception HAPA's main aim was addressing the educational needs of young refugees arriving as unaccompanied children:

The concept was started in 2006: we saw a lot of problems, young children, unaccompanied children, dropping out of school.. and that is when we started in the beginning, to look at solutions and understand why most of them dropped school... and then we figured that there are lots of obstacles in terms of the system... those young people they were coming here on their own and they have no parents in this country... [Suleiman]

The issues HAPA identified as in need of urgent intervention related to the lack of English support and remedial education for refugees from the Horn of Africa and to the obstacles they encountered in trying to access third level education. In 2008 HAPA set up a homework club (Dublin Cross Cultural Club) where volunteers – Irish and of different nationalities- give tuition in core subjects, such as English, Maths, Science, Chemistry etc. Funding for the project was secured when Suleiman Abdulahi received a Level 1 award of 5,000 euro from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland.⁴⁰ Additional funding was provided by St Stephen's Green Trust, Dublin City Council, and Department of Justice through the Office of the Minister of State for Integration.

HAPA's homework clubs were first held in the Macro Community Resource Centre in Dublin 7 and then moved to Cairde, Dublin 1. At present classes are held in HAPA's new office in Abbey Street. The DCCC's success is evident in the number of volunteers:

Since DCCC started in 2008... it provided over 96 hours of mentoring on a weekly basis, excluding our organisers' time... we would have 20 or 30 young people... twice a week for three hours... and if you think 96 hours multiplied by 25 euro... which is the minimum in this country... so it is over 2,400 euro... and nobody would give you this type of funding per week... but it is individuals who have given for the community...supporting others... and this year we want to double the amount of hours... [Suleiman]

⁴⁰ Social Entrepreneurs Ireland is a charitable organisation supporting the early stage development of social entrepreneurs by providing financial investment, technical training, peer networking, and mentoring. See www.socialentrepreneurs.ie.

Two of our participants, who attended DCCC regularly, said the support they received from volunteers impacted positively on their academic results and self-confidence:

Yes it is helpful and useful... because sometimes... maybe you can't do it but... if you get more information and more explanation... then you are like.. 'yes, I can do it'... when I go to homework club...when they explain it to me... then I do it... so it is very helpful...[Ilhan]

At a more basic level the homework club provides a physical space which is conducive to studying:

There are so many young persons who live in a small bedsit... and they have no sufficient space for living... they have no study room and they cannot study, they wouldn't achieve as someone who has a comfortable place to stay... they cannot get at the level they want... because all the time they have to go to the library, they have no access to the internet... [Suleiman]

The club not only addresses educational disadvantage but also creates opportunities for 'cross cultural contact' through the promotion of social events like outings, training and sport activities.

We have a Spanish volunteer, a Danish, even a South Korean... and a South Korean and a Somali have never met in a room... in Ireland before we started... and this was also kind of integration... we also did social events... we did parties... like Christmas party... and when we finished the Leadership Training we had a gathering... all these young people, 32 young people... from Spain, Sudan, Somalia, Denmark...all these different nationalities coming together...

HAPA and DCCC are committed to develop and strengthen leadership skills in young people with a refugee background through mentoring and peer-led initiatives. In February 2009, HAPA, in conjunction with Lucca Leadership Ireland, organised a three days Leadership Training (sponsored by the Office of the Minister for Integration) which involved 32 young people and 6 mentors.

The feedback from young people was amazing... it created friendships, understanding... we have a young man who took part in the training and after that he set up a football team in Blanchardstown... this young man, he is 20 years old...he is from Somalia and he set up a football team... and he became a volunteer for us... he started to come to the tutoring club, since he came back from the leadership training... and his team got an award... they won... we had a peace tournament organised by the DCCC... so his team was competing with 16 others... and they won the Peace Prize... [Suleiman]

As well as organising the homework club, in May 2009 DCCC volunteers also started to provide free English classes (beginners and advanced) for young and unemployed people

We asked students who were taking part in the homework clubs... if they were interested ... in attending the English classes...and many said yes... and then we printed posters and we put them in libraries... Internet café where the communities go... and with service providers.... and in the hostels as well... so we got asylum seekers as well... [Suleiman]

HAPA also identified a need for homework clubs in areas outside Dublin but lacked financial resources and premises to expand its services. To overcome this issue, HAPA spearheaded another initiative whereby volunteers are matched with a refugee family living nearby. Through this project, HAPA is actively expanding its clientele base (especially through reaching out to women and elderly people).

We have started another concept... we get volunteers who want to help people locally, in Tallaght, Lucan and other areas... you can meet in the library or at home, instead of both of you coming to the homework club... one volunteer is helping a mother and her children together at home... so the mother also can learn English...[Suleiman]

Most importantly, by involving families rather than single individuals, this initiative promotes forms of 'holistic' integration that are more sensitive to possible generational issues within families and more respectful of parents-children and siblings dynamics. Feedback provided by volunteers to DCCC testifies to the positive outcomes of the initiative:

Just a quick note to give you some feedback with regard to my tuition with Mohammed's family. I was with them tonight for the second time and things are progressing well. Last week was a little daunting due to the large number of children involved and it being my first night. However, this evening was very successful. Mohammed and his children... all appear very willing to succeed and grateful for my efforts. After helping five of the older children with homework, I had a lovely and interesting conversation with them about how they find living in Ireland [email from a DCCC volunteer].

Since the beginning of March 2010, I have been taking part in an intriguing project organized by the Dublin Cross Culture Club (DCCC), a volunteer group based in Abbey Street, Dublin. What this fascinating project entails is me visiting the home of a Somali family once a week, whereby I teach English to F. Along with her husband A and their son I have been welcomed into their home with open arms from the very beginning. This project appealed to me as it allowed me to meet foreign nationals here in Dublin and simultaneously obtaining some invaluable teaching experience. I recall my apprehension the very first evening I visited their house and introduced myself. I had entered the home of strangers but in no time at all we grew more comfortable and at ease with each other. Since then our friendship has flourished.

The benefits of tutoring one to one is that I can tailor the session to F's needs as regards her everyday life such as the conversational skills required at the post office, supermarket or getting a bus into town. Phonics, reading, writing, learning new vocabulary, listening skills and oral work take place during our class using different teaching methodologies. During this time I have learned about Somalia and its culture and the differences/similarities to the Irish culture. It has been of great interest thus far. This particular project has allowed me to see the benefits of my involvement towards the wider community. I found this to be a fantastic way of interacting with people of a different cultural background to my own. The learning has been reciprocated. As regards F, it gives her the opportunity to interact with an Irish person on a more personal level.

Furthermore, I have seen how difficult it is for people who have left their family and friends behind to seek a new life in a country far away from their own. This is certainly the case as regards F and A. Their optimism and determination to build a new life in Ireland is inspiring. My personal belief is that if people have the time, they should involve themselves in projects such as these. I have found the experience to be immensely enjoyable and satisfying. This opportunity has allowed me to gain access into the lives of others that I wouldn't normally have had. I regard this type of project a successful one and I hope to continue tutoring as part of the Cross Cultural Club into the foreseeable future [email from a DCCC volunteer].

HAPA is trying to export its successful model of homework clubs and volunteer-match to other parts of Ireland. In this way local communities can become self-sufficient and build up resources for long-term integration.

In county Carlow, for instance... they need the same service provided here... some told me that they wanted to buy tickets for their children who are attending Junior Cert and Leaving Cert to come here and go back to Carlow... and I said: 'this is not the solution: this is going to be very expensive'... and also something could happen on the way... that is why I am thinking to do it in other counties as well... I have registered with the Carlow Volunteering Centre and they were very positive... and they are planning to open a similar place... [Suleiman]

In the beginning of 2009 HAPA managed to establish a Horn of Africa Resource Centre, which functions as a drop-in centre open Monday to Friday, providing free information, referral and interpreting services in relation to accommodation, employment, education, health and legal issues.

We are doing referrals all the time... we refer people to homeless agencies, like Threshold... and we do referrals to all the service providers in the city... and other cities as well... we got people making inquiries and we provide information because we have got a little bit of information about all the organisations... like how to get legal aid... for example many asylum seekers come to us and we provide translation and interpretation for free... I myself go voluntarily all the time... to the hospitals... Department of Justice... everywhere I can go... we also try and help people get into college and training courses. We try and link people with organisations and colleges because there is really very little information given to people about what they are entitled to, and even when there is it can be confusing. [Suleiman]

Since 2006 HAPA's members have been networking with a variety of service providers, NGOs and government departments:

The first step we took was to engage service providers, contact the government, the Office of Integration... first we focused on education and accommodation... so we raised awareness with service providers and discussed family reunification with the Refugee Information Service... and other service providers ... there are many issues: the length of time they are waiting... for example, there are people who arrived here five or six years ago and they are still waiting... the issues of unaccompanied children dropping out of school and family reunification are the main ones... and also employment... unemployment was so high for the communities... and still this situation continues... nothing has changed in term of employment... but in terms of education... we got some improvement... for example the homework club... we saw results [Suleiman]

HAPA members are also engaged in outreach activities, travelling to hostels and isolated centres or visiting people in hospital, and they try to promote community building and civic participation. Faduma, who had only recently come into contact with HAPA, said she was looking forward to 'getting more involved' at the grassroots level:

Here in Dublin... I didn't know where to start from... because I don't know anyone in Dublin... but Suleiman told me 'from now on I will take you to people's organisations'... to do something...and I told him I would be there with him, if he takes me... I will try to get involved with organisations... to get ideas, to share ideas... [Faduma]

Faduma also spoke of the need to set up a women's group to address Somali women's needs from a gender perspective:

If you get a women's group... to organise something... it is good... when I was in Waterford... I was part of a group of women, we used to talk about... domestic violence... like... what we can help... what we can do... we come together... we chat... we talk... we organise... it was good... [Faduma]

HAPA plans to expand its services to include adult literacy programmes, and to work closely with local businesses to facilitate work placements for young people. The association is also striving to build up human and financial resources to support development initiatives back home:

Our dream is to set up an overseas... support also back home... any kind of resource we can find for the people living in the Horn of Africa... but at the moment our focus is to support young people here and if they become well educated, well-integrated... they will support back home, all of them... so one of the reasons we set up this place is that young people can contribute to society here and also contribute to rebuild their country and have a future where they belong...[Suleiman]

8. Recommendations

To get work... to do something... to get a new place to live... ehmm... to get my husband to join me in Ireland and to find my family... that is important for me...
[Faduma]

This study focused on Somali refugees in Ireland, however the following recommendations apply to all individuals seeking asylum or who have been granted refugee status in Ireland.

EQUALITY

- Apply equality legislation to all individuals living in Ireland: discrimination against non-Irish nationals should not be permitted.⁴¹
- Apply the principle of equality of services to people seeking asylum.
- Couple the promotion of mainstreaming, across all service provision, based on equality legislation with targeted support measures for refugees.

INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

- Ensure participation by refugees and asylum seekers in needs assessments and the formulation of resettlement/integration policies. Reception conditions and asylum procedures have a negative impact on refugee integration: include asylum seekers in integration policies.

REFUGEE POLICIES

- Strictly follow the new guidelines set out in May 2010 by the UNHCR promoting a stronger and more consistent approach by governments to the protection needs of civilians fleeing Somalia. These guidelines encourage governments to assess applications for refugee status from persons from central and southern Somalia in the broadest possible way.⁴²
- Develop more effective processes of reception and a long-term view of refugee resettlement.

ASYLUM SEEKERS

- View people seeking asylum in Ireland as refugees awaiting formal recognition rather than criminalise them.
- Permit individuals seeking asylum to work. Prolonged periods of forced exclusion from the labour market negatively impact on individuals' health, result in deskilling and poverty, and make re-insertion into employment more difficult. Ireland should at

⁴¹ 'S. 14 of the Equal status Acts 2000-2004 contains a number of exemptions which allow discrimination if such discrimination is allowed by legislation, either domestic or European and also discrimination against non-nationals on specific grounds' (FLAC, 2009: 76)

⁴² *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia* (2010: 9).

least subscribe to the EU Reception Directive which strongly recommends that asylum seekers are granted right to work after a stated period of time.⁴³

- Abolish direct provision and dispersal, having failed to meet human rights standards as set out in Irish and EU law and international human rights treaties.

RESETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

- Assess the housing needs of refugees from Somalia and other countries in light of pre-arrival traumatic experiences of displacement and forced removal.
- Assist individuals leaving direct provision centres to find appropriate housing. Accommodation support should be part of refugee integration, as in other EU countries (UNHCR Ireland, 2009: 60-4)
- Facilitate access to social housing for refugees and provide guidance to affordable housing options.
- Make special provisions in terms of housing for vulnerable groups of refugees (the elderly, the disabled, single women, one parent families etc)
- Enforce housing regulation standards to improve the quality of housing offered to refugees.⁴⁴
- Implement stricter inspection practices of direct provision centres and privately rented accommodation.
- Conduct research on how people exiting the asylum system access housing information and on the trajectories of their housing careers, in order to influence policy and service provision (NCCRI, 2008; Focus Ireland and ICI, 2009).

SEPARATED MINORS

- Put in place targeted support services for aged-out minors.
- Do not transfer minors who apply for asylum from HSE care to the direct provision system with adult asylum applicants. Establish dedicated units for aged-out minors
- Do not remove aged-out minors living and attending school in Dublin as part of RIA's dispersal policy. This measure can damage the education of young, vulnerable people and separate them from friends and other support networks (Joyce and Quinn, 2009)
- Follow up aged-out minors, recognised by the HSE's *Intercultural Health Strategy* (2008) as an at-risk group.

⁴³ The directive sets out minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers 'to ensure them a dignified standard of living and comparable living conditions in all Member States' (EU Council Directive 2003/9/EC, 27 January 2007)

⁴⁴ According to Focus Ireland, more than 33,000 dwellings were inspected under existing regulations between 2002 and 2006. Although 10,162 did not meet legal requirements; only 79 legal actions were taken by local authorities.

http://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/images/8916_MakingaHomeIreland_Fullreport.pdf

DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

- Recognise the racism to which Somalis and other migrants are subjected in the housing and labour market. Create local authorities databases of properties available for rent to minimise the exploitation by landlords and assist refugees with finding accommodation and employment.
- Address housing and neighbourhood planning so as to prevent ethnic segregation in poorly serviced areas.
- Firmly establish antiracism within integration and resettlement policies
- Support migrant-led initiatives/groups which promote antiracism

EMPLOYMENT

- Establish integration measures to promote labour market participation programmes for refugees, such as mentoring arrangements and women-specific schemes.
- Run targeted FÁS programmes and courses to address the needs of refugees seeking employment. Introduce English language courses to ensure refugees are able to access these programmes.⁴⁵
- Conduct further research on labour market access by Somali and other refugees leaving direct provision. As refugees are entitled to social welfare, unemployment may not result in destitution or homelessness, which means that other effects of unemployment may be underestimated.
- Include the issue of the employment needs of refugees and migrants in labour market discussions, particularly in light of the recession. Migrants are particularly vulnerable to labour market adjustments and redundancy measures: cutbacks in welfare provision are likely to disproportionately impact on refugees and migrants living in Ireland who may have limited access to other social support networks.

EDUCATION

- Place greater emphasis on remedial education in primary and post-primary schools, and on English language support, career guidance and information.
- Introduce home language instruction for Somali and other refugee children who lack sufficient command of English.⁴⁶
- Employ refugee and ethnic minority support teachers as liaison between home and school and role models drawn from the same community (Olden, 1999: 219).
- Permit asylum seekers to access full time third level education, currently denied them.
- Establish a clear pathway to higher education for refugees seeking academic training. Universities should devise outreach programmes to provide information, orientation and vocational guidance.

⁴⁵ See FÁS's *Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Initiatives* <http://www.fas.ie/en/Equality/Social+Inclusion+and+Equal+Opportunities/>

⁴⁶ For information on the provision of home language and culture by various migrant associations, see www.tcd.ie/immigration/networks/mapping

- Establish a number of graduate and postgraduate scholarships for individuals with refugee background and asylum seekers, based on academic merit.
- Provide all encompassing integration policies for young refugee and migrant children, establishing specific initiatives within existing services targeted at young refugees and asylum seekers.
- Actively promote leadership training and youth-led programmes through the Office of the Minister for Integration, in tandem with local authorities (Roffman et al, 2003)
- Support the development of young refugee-led groups by providing access to local authorities' publicly owned spaces.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

- Recognise that prolonged enforced separation from family members causes great hardship for refugees and their families and increases their isolation and marginalisation in Irish society, and that family reunification has a positive impact on refugees' settlement and integration.
- Deal with family reunification applications in the most humane and expeditious manner, especially when children are concerned, in keeping with Ireland's obligations under article 10 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Broaden the definition of the family for the purposes of family reunification beyond the notion of the marital nuclear family. The UNHCR *Guidelines on Reunification of Refugee Families* (1983) recommend that countries of asylum 'apply liberal criteria in identifying those family members who can be admitted with a view to promoting a comprehensive reunification of the family'.⁴⁷
- Recognise that the absence of documentary proofs of formal relationship (marriage, birth certificates, etc), should not be considered an impediment. The lack of central government and a functioning bureaucracy in Somalia means that documents are not issued or difficult to obtain. Documents are also lost in the course of forced and sudden displacement or following military conflict.
- Grant people with Leave to Remain in Ireland a right based in law to family reunification.

MIGRANT AND REFUGEE-LED GROUPS

- Recognise and adequately fund the contribution of groups such as HAPA, who, due to lack of funding, are forced to concentrate on providing essential needs rather than focus on building resources for long-term interventions.

⁴⁷ See <http://www.unhcr.ie/familyreunion.html>

9. Conclusion

Two main conclusions arise out of this small-scale study. The first is that the issues facing Somali refugees in Ireland are emblematic of the limits of Ireland's integration policies. The second conclusion is that despite their traumatic experiences in Somalia, during the journey to Ireland, and their difficult life experiences in Ireland, Somalis refugees are resilient and creative in establishing community structures to support more vulnerable members, in particular the younger generation.

International research, surveyed in this study, indicate that Somali refugees constitute a particularly vulnerable population group. Fleeing catastrophic war conditions and arriving in Europe often without linguistic or educational skills, Somali refugees experience high unemployment rates, difficult educational trajectories and troublesome resettlement. Racial and religious discrimination coupled with isolation – due to the difficulties in securing family reunification compound their less than smooth resettlement in their new European destinations. All of this means that Somalis constitute a population group that needs greater support from reception and resettlement agencies, support which is not always forthcoming.

Integration policies in Ireland address several indicators, including labour force participation, language acquisition, continuing education, naturalization and citizenship, voting rights, inter-marriage and military service (Lenihan, 2008: 25). Most of these indicators exclude asylum seekers and people without either refugee status or humanitarian leave to remain. Indeed, while the Minister of State for Integration and Equality Mary White stressed, integration policies are aimed solely at those who 'are legally resident here' (Reilly, 2010b), and although asylum seekers have a legal right to present their applications, many members of Ireland's Somali population who are asylum seekers are not candidates for state integration policies. Furthermore, while refugees are dealt with by the Reception and Integration Agency – and despite the limitations of the direct provision system (discussed in section 6.1), there is no one agency in charge of assisting refugees *after* they have been granted refugee status or humanitarian leave to remain. They often fall between a variety of state agencies in seeking to address issues relating to accommodation, employment, education, as discussed in this study. Issues raised by our participants in relation to access to third level education, employment and language acquisition demonstrate that the 'integration indicators' are hardly applicable to Somali refugees in Ireland. In addition, the fact that Somalis in Ireland are Muslims offers another limit to integration, despite the attempts by NGOs such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland and others to address the challenges to Ireland by the immigration of Muslims, thus racialising them as posing a specific challenge.

The second major conclusion of this study is, however, more positive. Despite the lack of any special resettlement programme or targeted support, all Somalis who took part in this study managed to rebuild their lives in a new country: they learnt a new language, became familiar with a different system; furthered their education; acquired an impressive array of new skills and adapted old ones. Furthermore Somalis living in Ireland have also set up a variety of associations and initiatives to assist other refugees and asylum seekers locally and can effectively mobilise support through their links in the diaspora.

The example of HAPA clearly highlights how self-reliance and community networks constitute a central aspect of 'integration from below' (Lentin, forthcoming). Set against the backdrop of schools and government agencies struggling to provide remedial education, career guidance, and targeted services for young refugees and asylum seekers, initiatives such as HAPA's represent affirmative forms of intervention and service provision capable of countering marginalisation. Hapa's existence also reminds us that, while it is important to document the issues and difficulties facing Somali refugees and asylum seekers, it is also fundamental to recognise and support bottom-up initiatives which testify to their strengths, resourcefulness, and ability to identify and address problems efficiently (Roffman, et al,

2003: 112). Integration policies across Europe often fail to acknowledge that migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are well equipped to identify their needs and provide solutions to specific issues which affect them. We believe that integration policies should recognise and capitalise upon these resources and promote refugees' participation –within service providers and policy making structures-in ways that view their agency and skills as central to the process of resettlement. This research also testifies to the resilience, resources and generosity of our participants as well as their willingness to overcome difficulties in empowering and enabling ways.

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