

EMN Ireland Migration Memo #9: How do EMN Member Countries distribute asylum centres and manage relationships with local communities?

This EMN Ireland Migration Memo summarises the finding from the EMN inform 'Distribution of international protection accommodation centres and relationship management with local communities'. This Migration Memo was prepared by Keire Murphy. [EMN Ireland](#) is the Irish National Contact Point of the [European Migration Network](#) and is located in the [Economic and Social Research Institute](#) (ESRI) and the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration.

The issue

Policies aiming to distribute international protection applicants across a country have become common features of reception systems. These policies aim to address concerns about the concentration of applicants and disproportionate burden on certain local areas. EMN countries have taken various approaches to decision criteria and how they govern distribution. Distribution policies can either contribute to integration and service provision or hinder it, depending on how they are designed.

The implementation of these policies is nuanced and can be contentious. This EMN Ireland Migration Memo outlines both distribution policies and how countries manage relationships with local communities when asylum accommodation centres are opened, though measuring their effectiveness is beyond the scope.

Criteria used to distribute applicants and centres

The majority of responding countries distribute either applicants (14) or centres (17) across their territory. For countries that **distribute applicants** through the territory, the most common criteria are based on individual needs of the applicants (e.g. health conditions, family status, age, sex, origin, ethnicity, religious affiliation, spoken language, labour profile), number and capacity of accommodation centres, and the demographic, economic and social characteristics of the regions. Germany uses a key that is based two thirds on tax revenue and one third on the population of each federal state. An algorithm then distributes applicants based on reception quotas and responsibilities related to country of origin.

Distribution criteria in France

France uses a distribution key based on the population size, gross domestic product per capita, unemployment rate, and regional reception capacities to set regional reception allocations.

For countries that **distribute centres** throughout the territory, generally the authorities responsible for accommodation centres are also responsible for defining distribution criteria. The Netherlands, Spain and Serbia consider multiple factors. In the Netherlands, the government estimates what the accommodation needs will be over the next two years. A distribution is then calculated based on population size and a socioeconomic status score that assesses prosperity, education level and labour market participation in the municipality. Spain looks at the number of inhabitants; the availability of living spaces that meet habitability standards; migratory pressure; transport infrastructure; and proximity to basic services, such as healthcare and education.

Engaging local stakeholders in opening centres

Five countries reported having **dedicated communication plans** to accompany the opening of an accommodation centre. Centralised agencies responsible for the reception of international protection applicants in the Netherlands and Sweden assume a leading role in developing communication plans. Austria, Luxembourg and Poland develop their respective communication plans through multi-level coordination, including with line ministries and their offices, centralised agencies, provinces and municipalities. Four countries (including Ireland) reported having different types of guidance in place for outreach with local actors upon the opening of a centre.

Most countries **engage local authorities** either before (9), upon the opening (3 - including Ireland), or both before and upon opening (4) of an accommodation centre in an area. In Finland, the service providers who open a new reception centre have a signed responsibility to collaborate with and inform local authorities.

The Netherlands' structured process for consultation with municipalities

The Central Agency for Asylum Seekers (COA) and the municipality agree on the number of applicants that can be accommodated and for how long, as well as arrangements for education, healthcare, public order, security and finance. This is all laid down in a management agreement. The city council oversees the process, often forming a project group. The group usually includes municipal employees involved in spatial planning, healthcare, safety, legal matters and communication. Several municipalities have also invited a COA employee to join the group, with the aim of enhancing cooperation.

Most countries **engage local communities** either before (10), upon opening (2) or both before and upon opening (4) of an accommodation centre. These processes aim to foster effective cooperation with

municipality residents, local organised groups, community representatives and other relevant stakeholders. 13 countries engage local communities and stakeholders with meetings that provide information on the new centre's purpose and function, as well as an opportunity to raise questions and concerns. Many countries supplement this with public outreach tools including press releases, flyers, newsletters, website posts, presentations and 'open house days'.

Belgium: sequence of consultations and outreach after a decision to open an accommodation centre



Resource management and service planning

Seven countries have a specific mechanism in place to provide additional resources for local services (e.g. healthcare, education, employment and language support, and transportation) when an accommodation centre opens. Different allocation criteria include:

- **Per capita:** In Belgium, local authorities receive funds based on the number and types of centres available in their territory, to support local police services and administration. In the Czech Republic, additional funding for the local government is calculated based on the number of applicants accommodated at the centre per day. In the Netherlands, municipalities receive resources for the provision of education, healthcare and security services (based on the number of beneficiaries).
- **Reimbursement:** In Sweden, municipalities can apply for reimbursement for the education services (pre-school, primary and secondary) that they provide to asylum-seeking children, while regional authorities receive a flat rate of compensation for healthcare services provided to international protection applicants.
- **Additional services:** The Spanish reception system has a mechanism to finance and manage a series of initiatives to supplement the provision of services already available at local level, including psychological assistance, language and employment support, and social and educational assistance.

Four countries (including Ireland) provide additional resources for local non-governmental groups.

Engagement of local stakeholders after opening of centres

Ten countries hold structured meetings with local authorities and service providers after an accommodation centre opens. These can involve local authorities, police, healthcare providers, educational institutions and NGOs. Countries take different approaches to the frequency of meetings, for example:

- **Belgium:** consultation with the mayor, municipal services, police, hospitals and pharmacies once a year, and consultation with schools twice a year.
- **Serbia:** mandatory monthly coordination meetings for each centre, including local authorities, service providers, local school authorities, the community health centre, and local centres for social work.
- **Poland:** quarterly meetings of local interaction teams (accommodation centre employees, police, border guards, NGOs), supplemented with ad hoc meetings in emergency situations.

Eight countries promote communication and exchange with local communities after the opening of a centre. For example, the Netherlands has developed a comprehensive consultation mechanism that brings local communities together with reception agency management and representatives of the municipality, local police and service providers. They convene regularly to monitor the situation and provide advice to the municipality. In Ireland, each local authority has a community integration forum that brings together state and non-state local actors working on integration of applicants and refugees, while Local authority integration teams (LAITs) provide a local point of contact to services.

Good practices

Multiple good practices were identified, including:

- Agreed measures upon opening e.g. roadmaps to ensure that relevant stakeholders are engaged in a timely way, centrally developed indicators to monitor engagement between the centre and local stakeholders, specialised committees, distribution keys developed in consultation with local authorities, dedicated teams that can build strong stakeholder relationships.
- Measures to foster community engagement e.g. cultural events, community discussions, training and support for community welcome groups, recruiting local staff, participation desks supporting asylum seekers to volunteer in the local community.
- Financial support to municipalities that host accommodation centres to improve their services and implement social cohesion measures.
- Clear, transparent and proactive communication with local stakeholders.

Key Takeaways

- Distribution is a common feature of reception systems, with countries using different criteria to distribute centres and applicants.
- Countries use different strategies to engage local stakeholders, including local communities and service providers before, during and after the opening of centres. Some countries have developed coordination and consultation mechanisms that could be used as models.
- Many countries have identified good practices, including advanced agreement on distribution and communication mechanisms, communication plans for the opening of new centres, proactive communication with local stakeholders, and financial support to hosting municipalities.

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