

Lost in Limbo: Ireland's Asylum Seekers Afraid to Speak Out

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Region: [Europe](#)

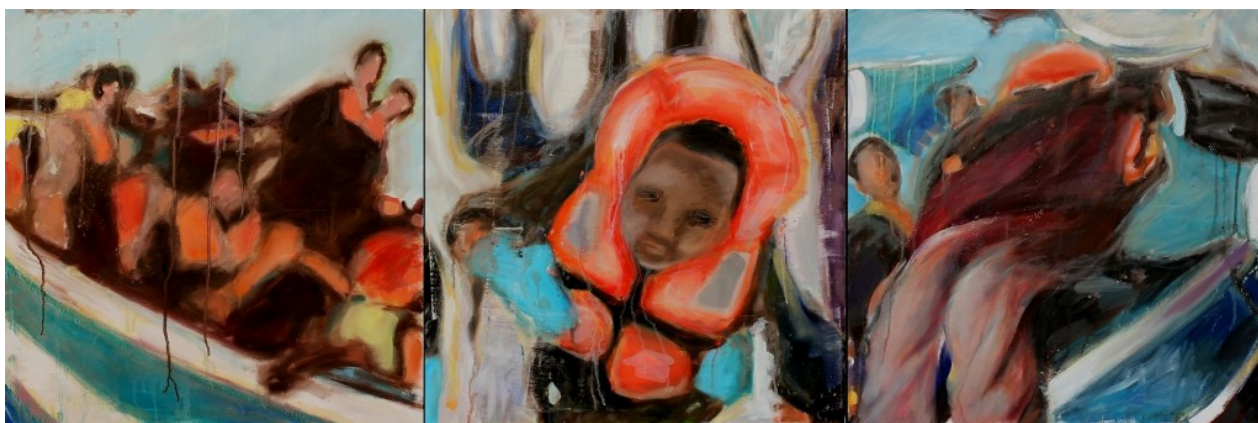
Theme: [History](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

On 5th of August 2015 the Irish Navy ship LÉ Niamh was sent to help an overcrowded vessel about 25 miles off the Libyan coast. As two rigid inflatable boats (Ribs) from the LÉ Niamh approached they signaled to the people to stay where they were so that life jackets could be given out.

However, according to [Capt Dave Barry](#): "Whatever happened, a number rushed to one side, and it capsized and sank in a couple of minutes".

A [total of 367 survivors](#) and 25 bodies were taken to the Sicilian port of Palermo.

Up to 700 people were believed to have been on board.



It is stories like these that have brought the migrant crisis directly to the doorsteps of the Irish public.

The journey to the Irish shores is far too long for these boats to appear on the Irish horizon but the daily media attention has brought about discussions relating to Irish migrant history of fleeing on 'coffin ships' to the U.S. in the 1840s. So many died on these [hazardous journeys](#) across the Atlantic, it was said that sharks followed the ships for the bodies thrown overboard.



Ireland's Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald [stated](#) recently:

"It is important that Ireland join together with our partners to assist in the relocation effort and show solidarity, just as we have on refugee resettlement and in the exemplary work of the Naval Service in search and rescue in the Mediterranean."

She also [said](#) that Ireland has agreed to accept 600 refugees, mainly from Syria and Eritrea, over the next two years.

While such numbers are very low compared to the numbers applying for asylum in Germany, for example, this does not mean that Ireland is isolating itself from international influences. According to the latest Globalization Index by the [KOF Swiss Economic Institute](#) (KOF) Ireland is the most globalized country in the world. While Ireland's open economy and low corporation tax rates account for much of this position, the individual categories put Ireland fifth in the [Social Globalization category](#) (size of foreign population, international information flow (access to internet, TV or foreign press) or import and export of books in relation to GDP).

The 'Celtic Tiger' boom years (1995-2000) saw a dramatic rise in its [migration](#) rate:

"Comparing Ireland to other EU countries underlines its rapid changes. From 1990 to 1994, Ireland was the only Member State with a negative net migration rate (number of migrants per 1,000 inhabitants) according to the EU statistical agency Eurostat. By 2007, Ireland had the third highest migration rate across the 27 EU Member States — 14.5 migrants per 1,000 inhabitants — surpassed only by Spain and Cyprus."

During that [same time](#) 'the number of persons seeking asylum in Ireland increased dramatically from only 362 in 1994 to a peak of 11,634 in 2002, before falling off in 2003 and down to approximately 3,900 in 2008. [...] Between 1992 and 2008, 9,574 non-EU nationals received refugee status. In 2007, the overall refugee recognition rate of asylum applicants at first and appeal stage was 10 percent.'

By 2014 1,444 [asylum applications](#) were received by the Department of Justice 'compared to 946 in 2013 equating to a 53 per cent increase.'

The difficulties for [asylum seekers](#) do not end upon arrival in Ireland as 'asylum seekers do not have the right to work in Ireland while the government is reviewing their applications. If,

however, their applications are successful and they are officially recognized as refugees, they acquire full employment and social rights and can eventually naturalize.'

According to a government website, under the policy of Direct Provision, asylum seekers [receive](#):

'Accommodation on a full-board basis. The cost of all meals, heat, light, laundry, tv, household maintenance, etc. are paid directly by the State. Personal allowances of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 euro per child per week.'

In a major article in The Irish Times last year, entitled 'Lives in Limbo', it was [noted](#) that 'many asylum seekers in the State's direct provision system spend years in conditions which most agree are damaging to the health, welfare and life-chances of those forced to endure them.'

The report went on to [state](#) that:

"The State-run Reception and Integration Agency says it ensures the basic needs of all residents are met. But the United Nations and international human rights groups have heavily criticised the system. Former Supreme Court judge Catherine McGuinness has predicted that a future government will end up publicly apologising for damage done by the direct provision system. The voices of asylum seekers are rarely heard. Many are fearful that speaking out will damage their request for refugee status."

This does not bode well in the current crisis for the new refugees who will be thrown into a lengthy process unless steps are taken to speed up the whole system.

Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin is an Irish artist who has exhibited widely around Ireland. His work consists of paintings based on cityscapes of Dublin, Irish history and geopolitical themes (<http://gaelart.net/>). His blog of critical writing based on cinema, art and politics along with research on a database of Realist and Social Realist art from around the world can be viewed country by country at <http://gaelart.blogspot.ie/>.

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