

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES****IRELAND**

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2004/21/494
<b>Title:</b>	Department of Defence: memorandum for the government on arrangements for catering for the needs of refugees from Northern Ireland in the Republic of Ireland.
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	January, 1973
<b>Level of description:</b>	Item
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	5 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

CD/

, 1972.

OIFIG AN AIRE COSANTAMEMORANDUM FOR THE GOVERNMENTCATERING FOR NORTHERN REFUGEES

1. The Northern Refugee problem erupted suddenly when refugees first commenced streaming over the border in August, 1969. While personnel of the Army, Civil Defence, Gárda Síochána, Red Cross, Order of Malta, etc. met the refugees at the border and rendered all immediate assistance possible, food and shelter for an indeterminate period had to be provided for these refugees at once. The most obvious practical solution to this problem was to utilise initially State controlled facilities already in existence. Two large Army Training Camps were located in close proximity to the border, viz. Gormanston and Finner, in which there existed at the time considerable accommodation, bedding, cooking facilities etc. and in relation to which administrative machinery already existed for the supply of food in large quantities. It was accordingly decided that the Army authorities would house and feed initially all refugees in Army Refugee Centres to be set up at these Camps and that other centres would be opened by the Army if necessary.
2. Clearly the refugees (particularly the women and children) would require, in addition to prepared food and accommodation, comforts and service of various kinds which they would miss away from home. The traditional channel through which the Government makes funds available for the relief of distress at home and abroad is the Irish Red Cross Society, and this body was therefore designated by the Government to co-ordinate the collection of funds, relief supplies, comforts, etc. for the refugees.
3. The Irish Red Cross Society supplied pocket money at the rate of 10/- (later increased to £1) a week to each adult refugee and 2/6d a week for each child. They also supplied clothing and footwear, washing machines, personal toilet requisites, washing powders, babies' bottles, baby foods, disinfectants, etc. They rendered first aid, cared for the sick and elderly, washed and dressed children, provided children's games, organised school buses (at Red Cross expense), brought patients to hospital and met hospital bills. A full-time trained Social Worker was also provided for a time at Red Cross expense. The cost of all transport for refugees, including the cost of free travel vouchers for their return to their homes, was met by the Red Cross.
4. In the matter of the accommodation and feeding of refugees it was realised at the time (1969) that, if the situation had worsened, and very large numbers had continued to arrive across the border, Local Authorities (with their Civil Defence Services) might have had to become involved to a major extent. They would have had to do what the Army authorities did, but it would obviously have been much more difficult for them inasmuch as accommodation, bedding, food, cooking facilities, etc. would not have been so readily available. Counties convenient to the border were actually alerted at the time to be ready for this possibility and these carried out certain preliminary planning. Had any local authorities become involved in the manner mentioned, Irish Red Cross Society personnel would have been given the same role in relation to refugees being catered for by Local Authorities as they had in the case of refugees in Army Refugee Camps.
5. A refugee problem arose again in the Summer of 1970 and the same procedures were followed as in 1969. While Northern refugees accommodated and fed entirely by the army numbered 720 at peak in 1969, the peak figure in 1970 was 1,558 - just over twice the 1969 figure.

2.

In 1969 and again in 1970 the Army authorities housed and fed all refugees for the full period of their stay.

6. Early in July, 1971, refugees again began to arrive over the border in somewhat ominous numbers. Again a public announcement was made through the Government Information Bureau that refugees arriving in the State were being catered for officially by the Army authorities. In the second week of August, 1971, however, refugees began to arrive in unprecedented numbers and the capacity of Army refugee centres at Gormanston, Finner, Kilworth, Coolmoney, Kildare, Kilkenny, Waterford and Tralee very soon became greatly exceeded. It then became necessary for the Minister for Defence to call upon Local Authorities, in exercise of their Civil Defence functions, to provide accommodation and food for appreciable numbers of refugees. It was, of course, school holiday time and religious leaders and communities, in addition to various other organisations and individuals, very generously placed their facilities and services at the disposal of the refugees. The *Gárda Síochána* also accommodated 600 at the Training Depot in Templemore for a short time. Counties Dublin, Meath, Longford, Sligo, Donegal, Cavan, Leitrim, Laois, Tipperary and Cork became involved in accommodating refugees in 1971, and at peak period 2,695 were being catered for by the Army and 2,714 outside of Army centres (total 5,409). Arrangements were made with the Department of Finance under which Civil Servants who were members of the Civil Defence Organisation, the Irish Red Cross Society, the St. John's Ambulance Brigade or the Order of Malta could be granted special leave with pay to enable them to give their services whole-time on a voluntary basis to the care of refugees under the auspices of Local Authorities. Industrial, commercial and other concerns were also urged to do their best to grant a similar concession in the case of their staffs.
7. Early in 1972 it was decided that, for military reasons, the Army would not be asked to provide accommodation for or to undertake the care of refugees in any future Northern refugee situation, and all Local Authorities were accordingly asked to make contingency plans for the reception and care of any future Northern refugees, utilising their Civil Defence Services. Every Local Authority was expected to take a quota of refugees. Regional Health Boards co-operated with Local Authorities in this matter. Responsibility for general direction and co-ordination of arrangements for refugees rested with the Department of Defence (Civil Defence Branch). Any expenses involved were to be borne in full by the Vote for Defence, with the exception of the cost of transport and comforts which were to be met by the Irish Red Cross Society.
8. Immediately preceding the 12th July, 1972, refugees began once more to arrive in appreciable numbers. The peak holding figure for any one day on this occasion was reached on the night of the 15th/16th July when 5,308 refugees were accommodated in the State. The number gradually decreased afterwards but it did not go below the 2,000 mark until the beginning of August. Approximately 9,800 refugees in all were handled during the months of July and August 1972. The whole operation was a major undertaking for the Civil Defence Organisation and every Local Authority in the country became involved. It was, however, accomplished with considerable smoothness, due largely to the soundness and thoroughness of the pre-planning which had been carried out and to the will with which all concerned tackled the tasks which had to be performed.
9. A number of problems have inevitably been met in connection with the handling of Northern refugees. Many of these were solved as they arose, but some have proved more intractable. For example, each year's influx of refugees brings with it a number of social

problem cases who would be misfits no matter where they were. These are in the main people who, through ineffectuality of one sort or another (mental subnormality, marital break-downs etc.), find it difficult to cope on their own with the stresses and strains of life and are reluctant to leave any place in which there is free food and accommodation. There are still of these kind of people (men, women and children) being taken care of by the Army at Kilworth Military Camp and more (men, women and children) being looked after by Dublin Corporation. An accommodation difficulty is also created by casual people (in ones, twos, threes, etc.) who arrive over the Border throughout the year and declare themselves to be refugees. Present policy is that no scrutiny is exercised on the bona fides of people from the North declaring themselves to be refugees. All are accepted as such at their word. The main difficulty in the latter context is that no specific body has been found in Northern Ireland which could exercise any co-ordination and control in that area in relation to refugees coming to the South (nor for that matter and body or agency with which contact could be made regarding the return of refugees). There is an arrangement under which people arriving at Royal Victoria Railway Station in Belfast, and declaring themselves to be refugees, are issued with free rail travel vouchers to Dublin by the Railway authorities, the cost being recouped later from the Irish Red Cross Society. All and sundry can take advantage of this and many who have no good reason to leave their homes in the North inevitably do.

10. For so long as a state of unrest continues in the Six-County area, the possibility will remain of large numbers of people having to leave their homes in the North and seek refuge in the Twenty-Six Counties. This should occur at any time of the year and without warning, and the numbers cannot, of course, be estimated. Fortunately, refugees in appreciable numbers over the past four years have arrived during the months of July and August (the "marching season") when the pupils of boarding schools were on holiday. The vast bulk of the accommodation provided for refugees so far has been in such schools. Efforts by Local Authorities to obtain accommodation other than in boarding schools have not met with any great success and, in this context, the response of other Government Departments (which may have accommodation around the country that might be used in an emergency for the housing of refugees) to requests by the Department of Defence to make such accommodation available has been disappointing.
11. The refugees who came down from the North in appreciable numbers in 1969, 1970 and again in 1971 (immediately following the introduction of internment) did so largely through fear for their personal safety. Most of them came on the spur of the moment and in great haste, bringing with them only what they wore. In 1972, however, the pattern was somewhat different. The refugees on this occasion had obviously made preparations in advance for a holiday in the South. Most of them had suitcases and numbers of the children carried swimming gear, tennis racquets, fishing rods, etc. Moreover, the exodus appeared to have been specially organised by different people from the various Catholic areas of Belfast. On the 27th July, 1972 the Regional Civil Defence Officer in Sligo reported that a number of refugees being accommodated in that area had stated that they understood that their "holiday" was being paid for out of about £3,000 specially collected from them for the purpose in Belfast over the previous year. Subsequently a report was received that refugees arriving in Waterford had expressed surprise at the arrangements made for them. They were not, they said, refugees at all and had understood that they were being sent down on a holiday to hotels, private houses, etc. Similar reports were received from Cork and Dublin. One woman informed a newspaper reporter ("Evening Herald" 4/8/72) that her husband was about to pay the expenses of a holiday for herself and the children, "but when people came around rapping on the door asking if we would like to go to the South we came". It is a situation that could be

4.

exploited by extremists for their own purposes or by unscrupulous people for profit. While normal comforts were provided for refugees in 1972 by the Red Cross, pocket money was not issued.

12. Refugees are not always just frightened people who are thankful for the assistance being given them. Some of them can be very demanding and ungrateful, even obstreperous and fractious - as well as, particularly in the case of teenage boys, destructive. Although those who came South in 1972 were not driven from their homes and were largely holiday makers, it was appreciated at Civil Defence headquarters that they were justifiably in need of a few weeks of peace and quietness away from the atmosphere of bombings and shootings in which they normally lived. Irrespective of their attitudes and behaviour, and their motivation coming South, Government policy has been interpreted - and continues to be interpreted - as requiring that they should all be accepted without question and treated to the best of our ability as groups of Irish people in need of help at a very difficult time.

13. In the matter of accommodation for Northern refugees the State is dependent to a very major extent on the good will and christian charity of religious communities, many of whom place their houses, boarding schools, colleges, etc. when not otherwise occupied, at the disposal of Local Authorities for the purpose. So far accommodation has been found for all refugees who have arrived in the State. The mainly "holiday" motivation of the 1972 influx was, however, widely known and commented on throughout the country and the reality of the need of the refugees for a respite from the unnerving atmosphere of the North was not always fully appreciated locally. After the 1972 refugee situation had passed there were indications from some religious communities of an intention not to become involved in housing refugees in future. There is, moreover, always the possibility, for so long as the Northern state of unrest lasts, of refugee situations arising during school term time when boarding schools and colleges would not be available, or even of a major crisis situation arising at any time of the year involving numbers of refugees vastly in excess of anything experienced hitherto. In situations of these kinds steps might have to be taken to close all boarding (and perhaps other) schools but, in addition, powers of compulsory acquisition of accommodation on a temporary basis might well become essential. Any such powers, to be effective, would require to be available at extremely short notice as refugees could not be left in the open while lengthy administrative processes were being followed.

14. The Minister for Defence considers it only prudent that all possible steps should be taken in advance to ensure that powers of temporary acquisition of accommodation for refugees could be made available rapidly should they be required. He has accordingly caused a draft General Scheme of a Bill to be prepared to enable legislation to be drafted and held in readiness for swift introduction to both Houses of the Oireachtas if the need should arise.

*what about  
emergency  
during the  
recess?*

15. Under the Air Raid Precautions Act, 1939 (as amended by the Air Raid Precautions (Amendment) Act, 1946) it is the duty of every Local Authority and every officer thereof to perform such functions in connection with the transference of members of the civilian population (of the State) from one area to another "in the event of attack from the air" and their accommodation, maintenance and welfare, as the Minister for Defence, after consultation with the Minister for Local Government, may direct. This duty does not, however, apply in relation to Northern refugees in peace time. Local Authorities are conscious of their legal position in this respect and it was only by the exercise of much persuasion and tact on the part of the Civil Defence controlling staff in the Department of Defence that all County Managers were eventually prevailed upon to undertake responsibility for the

5.

accommodation and care of Northern refugees. While they have now accepted that responsibility a somewhat uneasy relationship continues to exist between some County Managers and the Department of Defence in relation to Northern refugees handling, particularly when problems arise which involve County Managers in unusual difficulties. They appear to convey the impression that they are being unduly imposed upon in this matter. The arrangements made are, however, working generally satisfactorily, but the Minister for Defence feels that, if any special legislation in relation to Northern refugees is being introduced, it should also provide for the imposition on Local Authorities of the duty of providing for the accommodation, maintenance and welfare of such refugees (at, of course, the expense of the Exchequer) as well as for the imposition on health boards of the duty to assist Local Authorities in caring for refugees whenever the Minister for Health so directs.

16. A draft General Scheme of a Bill to provide for (a) the imposition on Local Authorities of the duty of providing for the accommodation, maintenance and welfare of Northern refugees and on health boards of the duty to assist and (b) the temporary acquisition of accommodation, if necessary, for such refugees was circulated to Government Departments on