

Annual Report

Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative

For the year ended 31 December 2020





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Company Information

Board of Directors	David Regan (Chair) Connie O'Halloran (Secretary) Luke Fitzgerald (Treasurer) Rev. Brendan Carr CSSp Miriam Birungi Omoro (retired 30/4/20) Siobhan Conlon John Tobin Grace Mulvey Rev. Paddy Moran CSSp Denis Murphy (joined 30/6/20) Sr Eileen Browne DOC (joined 30/6/20) Immaculate Akello (joined 30/6/20)
Company secretary	Connie O'Halloran
Registered number	476831
Tax Registered number	CHY16923
Registered office	213 North Circular Rd Dublin 7
Independent auditors	Woods Delaney and Partners Grattan Street Portlaoise Co. Laois R32 HR62
Bankers	Bank of Ireland 34 College Green Dublin 2
Solicitors	DT O'Driscoll Solicitors Level 1 The Chase Carmanhall Road Sandyford Business District Dublin 18 218 YcX2 DX 211011



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Forward from the Executive Director

As a consequence of the Covid 19 pandemic, Spirasi closed its offices in March 2020, began to provide its services online and over the phone, and all staff moved to work remotely from home. Overall the offices remained closed for the rest of the year, with the exception of several weeks during the summer where, following Government advice, it was deemed safe enough to carry out a limited number of Medico Legal Assessments onsite. That the services continued in a relatively seamless manner is a testament to the flexibility, hard work and commitment of the staff and I take this opportunity to thank them for their extraordinary contribution during this time.

It is important to note, however, that the impact of the pandemic on our clients has been stark. All were able to continue to avail of our services to some degree, but often the lack of one or more of the following - a smart phone, adequate IT equipment, internet access and a confidential space - made it a very challenging experience for both clients and staff alike. Furthermore, the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic, particularly for those living in Direct Provision, often mimicked the sorts of realities our clients experienced in their countries of origin. The ensuing lack of choice and restricted movement increased stress levels, often retriggering trauma leading to a significant increase in suicidality.

The impact on staff as a result of the heightened needs of clients has also been significant. While in general staff welcomed the opportunity to work from home, some have missed the ordinary camaraderie of the office and its inherent support. In response to the increased need of clients and the move to remote working, management worked hard to ameliorate the challenges, ensuring staff have adequate equipment, reminding them of boundaries and of the importance of self-care, meeting regularly, and providing training on key risks associated with working from home.

Despite the reduction in the numbers of those seeking international protection in 2020 waiting lists continued to be long with average waiting times being from 8-10 months. Apart from the inevitable extra and unnecessary suffering this brings on our client group it is also distressing and disheartening for staff. Both these factors have led to a renewed effort from the Board to seek out adequate resources.

One bright point in the midst of a dark pandemic worth noting is that the move online for our services has provided new avenues for reaching our client group. These new avenues of support, which dovetail nicely with our strategic aim of further regionalising our services, will be maintained and developed into 2021 and beyond.

Withal I continue to be moved by the resilience of our clients, the possibility of healing, the dedication and commitment of staff and volunteers, and the continued support of those funding Spirasi and the Spiritan sponsorship of Spirasi without which this work would simply not happen. It is important to say that torture continues to exist in our world, often with impunity, and that part of our work is to advocate for a world where torture ceases to exist and the work of Spirasi is no longer necessary.

The following report gives an overview of the work of Spirasi for the year ending December 2020.

Rory Halpin
Executive Director



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Introduction

Who we are and What we do

The National Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture, Spirasi, provides a unique and specialised service, namely, holistic rehabilitation to victims of torture and Medico Legal Reports for the International Protection Process. Our clients are refugees or asylum seekers seeking international protection. According to research studies¹ in the area, of those seeking international protection, at least 50% of all asylum seekers are victims of torture. This is regardless of where people are from and where they seek asylum. It means that, of the 1566 people who sought asylum in Ireland in 2020² - a number significantly lower than the 4781 who applied for asylum in 2019 because of Covid 19 travel restrictions - over 700 were probably victims of torture.

Vision and Mission Statements

Vision - Supporting Victims of Torture to rebuild their lives in Ireland.

Mission - Through our models of care, training programmes and alliances, Spirasi leads in rehabilitating Asylum Seekers and Refugees who are victims of torture.

Values

- *Holistic approach to rehabilitation* As a way of acknowledging the complexity of the human person.
- *Integrity* In personal and professional dealings.
- *Justice, Equality, Compassion* In access to services, in working relationships, with our clients.
- *Respect* For the dignity and uniqueness of individuals and the diversity of their cultures.
- *Solidarity* With disadvantaged people given practical expression through our work.
- *Accountability, Inclusion and Transparency*

Torture and its Impact

Torture is defined as

'any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.'³

It is sometimes used by governments to extract information from people but mostly it is employed to coerce, to instil fear, and to control – individuals, groups and entire populations. While it is largely ineffective as a means of gathering accurate information, it is hugely effective in controlling behaviour through fear. 141 countries throughout the world continue to use torture, although many are signatories to the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT)⁴.

The personal implications of torture are always devastating. Those who have been tortured are physically, psychologically, socially and spiritually broken, the extent of which depends on several factors including the severity and length of torture period and the individual's resilience. The whole person is affected and the whole person requires healing.

¹ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5314892/

²

<http://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/IPO/IPO%20Website%20Statistics%20December%202020%20FINAL.pdf/Files/IPO%20Website%20Statistics%20December%202020%20FINAL.pdf>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>



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United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT)

In 1999 Ireland signed the United Nations Convention Against Torture⁵ which, in 2000, was ratified through the Criminal Justice (United Nations Convention Against Torture) Act. Article 14 of the Convention affirms that each state must provide for “as full a rehabilitation as possible” for victims of torture within their jurisdiction. This applies to all persons, regardless of residency status. In December 2012 the Committee Against Torture published a General Comment on Article 14⁶ stating that “The obligation to provide rehabilitation for victims of torture does not relate to the available resources of States parties and may not be postponed”. Spirasi is the primary organisation in Ireland implementing the obligations of the Irish state under Article 14 of UNCAT⁷.

Apart from the IRPP the number of people arriving through our ports seeking protection in Ireland increased by approximately 25% year on year, from 2,926 in 2017 to 3,673 in 2018, to 4781 in 2019. The upshot is that numbers accessing Spirasi services continue to increase putting pressure on already insufficient resources.

Committee Against Torture (CAT) Recommendations

In August 2017 the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT) published its Concluding Observations on Ireland’s performance under UNCAT since 2013⁸. The Committee recommended *inter alia* that the Irish State should provide adequate funding to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees who are torture victims should have access to specialized rehabilitation services that are accessible countrywide. It also recommended support and training for personnel working with asylum seekers with special needs. In responding to the call of CAT, Spirasi proposed, in its Strategic Plan 2018-20, to reach out beyond Dublin so that those needs could be more adequately addressed. Spirasi continues to advocate with the State to ensure CAT’s recommendations are fully realised.

1. Strategic Planning – 2021 and beyond

In late 2017 a decision was taken by the Spirasi Board that the work of the organisation from 2018 needed to be guided by a comprehensive new Strategic Plan, and it was agreed that this would cover the three-year period of 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2020.

Key Objectives

The Strategic Plan 2018-20 outlined the following six clear objectives:

1. Spirasi will engage with all key stakeholders to support / fund the mission to provide wider access to effective rehabilitation;
2. Spirasi will move towards greater clarity of its mission, careful profiling of its work and appropriate approaches to policy development & advocacy;
3. Spirasi will develop validated, transferable models of good practice in rehabilitating and integrating victims of torture for replication regionally;
4. In order to meet the mental health needs of victims of torture throughout Ireland, Spirasi will work with regional agencies to develop effective local services;
5. Spirasi will engage with existing and new partners to develop and enhance its work, and extend its capacity to help victims of torture;
6. Through a fully participative process, Spirasi will seek to bring about the necessary change at all levels to support the realisation of its strategic plan;

⁵ [ibid](#)

⁶

⁷ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fGC%2f3&Lang=en

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>

⁸ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CAT/Shared%20Documents/IRL/INT_CAT_COC_IRL_28491_E.pdf



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Pilot Project

The plan began with a Foundation Year in 2018, a key part of which was to run, in conjunction with HSE Mid-West, a pilot project in Limerick to answer key questions around expansion, training and need. The report issued on the basis of the project made the following recommendations:

1. Establish a Spirasi Training Unit.
2. Develop an Operational Plan aligned to the Spirasi Strategic Plan (2018-2020).
3. Deliver Spirasi Regional Roll-out.
4. Develop Relationships & Communicate the Spirasi message more widely.

These recommendations bore out the main thrust of the plan, namely to regionalize our services by offering training to local mental health services. It did, however, throw up something new and unexpected, and this was recommendation No.3, to build on and expand the already-existing Limerick model - a Spirasi therapist working one day a week in tandem with a local NGO (Doras Luimni) which provided the wrap-around psychosocial supports - to other regions around the country.

The key learnings from the last few years is that the training of local health services, while remaining both doable and desirable, is more of a long-term project. It has proven difficult to find funding for a training officer in the short term. In contrast the model of a therapist working with and in a local NGO has found traction with funders and locally-based NGOs alike. The model services a real need providing therapeutic and psychosocial supports for clients based regionally. Relationships with both statutory and non-statutory services are built up which may, crucially, provide a better and more sustainable pathway to delivering training to local health services in an organic manner in the longer term.

Fundraising

2020 has seen a growing awareness across the organisation for a need to focus more particularly on Objective 1 of the Strategic Plan, namely, the provision of adequate resources and supports for remuneration of staff and to manage better the ever increasing demand for our services. To this end a new Fundraising and Development Officer was employed in May 2020.

Beyond 2020 – a new Strategic Plan

Towards the end of 2020 the Board agreed to develop a new Strategic Plan for 2022 and beyond. As an interim measure for 2021, it was decided use the year to consolidate processes and policies using a yearly operational plan with the following key objectives:

- a) Adequate funding/resourcing of the organisation and its mission for 2021 (and beyond)
- b) Completion and Implementation of all department Work Plans
- c) Development of Key Policies and Processes
- d) Development and Completion of Strategic Plan for 2022-5

It is worth pointing out that the Board, through the Activity Sub Committee, has systematically been overseeing the development of operational policies in each area of the organisation. These policies and processes will form the basis of discussions for the new Strategic Plan 2021 and beyond.



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2. Governing Structure

The Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative CLG (Spirasi) is a company Limited by Guarantee. It was incorporated under the Companies Act 2014 on 27 October 2009, registered under part 18 of this act, and does not have a share capital. It is governed by a memorandum and articles of association, which were last amended at the Annual General Meeting on 10/10/17.

The members' liability is limited to the amount they have undertaken to contribute to the assets of the company, in the event it is wound up, not exceeding the amount specified in the memorandum. As a guarantee company does not have a share capital, the members are not required to buy any shares in the company.

Board of Directors

Under its constitution, Spirasi is governed by a Board of Directors, appointed by the Trustees (members of the Spiritan Congregation and the members of the CLG) for three-year terms. The Directors, who are nonexecutive, represent a diverse range of relevant expertise. The Board meets seven times each year and has responsibility for all the business of the organisation.

The Board is supported by a board-committee structure which deals effectively with specific aspects of the business of the company. The Board committees in place are the Audit and Finance Committee and the Activity Sub Committee.

The Executive Director is appointed by the Board and s/he is responsible for the overall management and organisation of Spirasi.

Board Members (at 31st December 2020)

David Regan (Chair)
Luke Fitzgerald (Treasurer)
Rev. Brendan Carr (C.S.Sp)
Connie O'Halloran (Secretary)
Siobhan Conlon
Grace Mulvey
Dr. John Tobin
Rev. Paddy Moran CSSp
Sr. Eileen Browne DOC (joined 30/6/20)
Immaculate Akello (joined 30/6/20)
Denis Murphy (joined 30/6/20)
Miriam Birungi Omoro (retired 30/4/20)

Executive Director

Rory Halpin was appointed by the Board to the role of Executive Director in February 2017.

Finance and Audit Subcommittee

The role of the Finance and Audit Committee is to keep under review the financial management of Spirasi as well as the adequacy, scope and effectiveness of accounting and internal control systems of all activities carried out by Spirasi. This Committee is chaired by the Treasurer and consists of four members, two whom also sit on the Board. The Committee meets seven times a year in advance of Board meetings. The Executive Director is normally in attendance.



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Members: Luke Fitzgerald (Treasurer and Chairperson), Peter O'Mahony, Brendan Carr CSSp, Sarah Behan.

Activity Subcommittee

The role of the Activity Subcommittee is to provide quality assurance across the organisation. Specifically its role is to monitor and evaluate operational policies and procedures to ensure continued best practice, keep under review all legal requirements and obligations of the organisation. It meets as required in advance of a Board meeting with the Executive Director normally in attendance.

Members: John Tobin (Chairperson), David Regan, Siobhan Conlon, Eileen Browne and Denis Murphy

Staff

As of December 2020, Spirasi employed 8 full-time and 34 part-time staff backed up with a dedicated team of interns and volunteers.

There are four Co-Ordinators who are responsible for rehabilitation, therapy, office management and education respectively, who report to the Executive Director. Along with the Grants Officer and the Finance Officer these six staff form a management team to oversee day-to-day functioning of the organisation.

3. Governance

In Spirasi, accountability and transparency are vitally important in everything that we do. We publish our financial accounts annually and, as of 2018, these are prepared in accordance with UK best practice Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) in the absence of statutory reporting standards for charities in Ireland.

We have always lodged our reports with the Companies Registration Office (CRO) and are committed to being fully compliant with the new Governance Code recently developed by the Charities Regulator.

4. Going Concern

Based on the results for the year, the year-end financial position and the approved 2021 budget, the Board of Directors believes that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason the Board continues to adopt the 'going concern' basis in preparing the financial statements.

5. Risk Management

Spirasi works with a vulnerable population that includes both adults and children who are victims of torture and/or severe trauma. The nature of this work means that we take on a medium to high level of risk in our core activity. We aim to minimise this through our ongoing risk assessment process and controls, including the need to ensure our work is appropriately resourced, across our identified areas of risk.

Spirasi examines the effectiveness of the systems of internal operational and financial control annually and confirms the operating effectiveness of those systems to the Board. The key components of Spirasi's internal control and risk management environment include the following:

- An approved plan and annual budget
- Regular reviews across all areas of our operations including policies and procedures



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- Key policies on children and working with a vulnerable population, Garda Vetting, health and safety, complaints and reporting of same, best clinical and HR practice.

Identified Risks

- Insufficient funding and resources
- Failure to deliver on mission and vision
- Poor quality of service delivery to clients
- Abuse of a client within our services
- Inadequate financial controls
- Reputational damage
- Poor business planning
- Breaching regulation or legislation

Spirasi carries out an annual external audit of our finances with occasional external audits from key funders. We employ a case file review of Active Case Management.

6. Budget

The HSE (Health Service Executive) recognizes Spirasi as the national provider of rehabilitation services for victims of torture and the organisation is funded under Section 39 of the Health Act 2004. The HSE has committed to the provision of funding to Spirasi on a yearly basis through an agreed Service Level Agreement.

In 2017 Spirasi received significant funding from the EU through the Asylum Migration and Integration fund which enabled a small but significant expansion of Medico Legal Report service. This funding was renewed and increased in 2019. Spirasi's core donors have been stable over the last number of years. Its budget was just in excess of €1,000,000 for 2020 and its key funders were:

- CDET (City of Dublin Education & Training Board)
- Christian Brothers
- Company of Mary
- Daughters of Charity
- EU under AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2022) supported by the Department of Justice and Equality
- EU through CONTEXT (Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant)
- HSE (Health Service Executive)
- Irish Province of the Spiritans
- Mercy Sisters
- Presentation Sisters
- Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux
- Spiritan Schools
- TUSLA (Child and family Agency)
- UNVFVT (United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture)
- World Mercy Fund.



7. Referral and Appointment Statistics

Number and Profile of Protection Applicants

The number of protection applications generally determines the number of new referrals to Spirasi's rehabilitation service. Applicants are referred in by either solicitors requesting Medico Legal Reports or GPs (and other healthcare professionals) requesting Initial Assessments. However, given that the capacity of Spirasi for new clients is approximately 250 per year and that the number of victims of torture is no lower than 10% and potentially as high as 50% of all international protection applicants, once the annual figure of those seeking asylum goes above 2,000, Spirasi's capacity will be exceeded. Having dipped to a low of 2,244 in 2016 the numbers of asylum seekers have steadily increased to a high of 4781 in 2019. Numbers reduced significantly in 2020 due to the pandemic but there is no reason to suggest numbers won't increase again as travel restrictions are lifted. Overall then Spirasi's capacity has remained static at 250 while the demand has increased year on year leading to significantly lengthening waiting lists.

At the end of 2020 Spirasi had 1,011 open cases with the following demographic:

- 38% Female, 62% Male,
- 3% under 18, 49% 19-35, 47% aged 36-60, and 1% aged more than 60,
- 74% asylum seekers,
- 22% refugees,
- 4% Irish citizens.

Asylum applications in Ireland

Year	Number
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Client Appointments



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Appointment type	Number of Appointments/Interventions
Initial Assessment	257
Medical Legal Assessment	94 (61 Reports)
Therapy -Individual, Group & Family	4,915
Psychosocial	1,152
Total	5,352

Demographics

- Of the Clients offered appointments 61% of clients were male, 39 % were female.
- 74 % of clients are asylum seekers, 20% are refugees & 6 % have other status.

Age Range

Age	% of Clients seen
0-18 Years	3%
19-30	27%
31-59	68%
60+	2%

Top Five Countries of Origin

- Zimbabwe
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- The Democratic Republic of The Congo
- Afghanistan

8. Services

Remit

With regard to its **remit**, Spirasi admits a person to its services if s/he falls within one of the following two categories:

(1) *Victims of torture*: it appears that the individual has been a victim of torture, as defined by the UN Convention against Torture, Article 1(1), which states:

‘For the purposes of this Convention, the term “torture” means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.’

(2) *Victims of other serious harm*: it appears that the individual has been a victim of inhuman or degrading



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treatment, within the meaning of Article 15(b) of the Qualification Directive (Council Directive 2004/83/EC) ‘torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of an applicant in the country of origin.’

Currently Spirasi provides several different services. These include:

Initial Assessment

The Initial Assessment (IA) forms a key part of the rehabilitation process, and is multidisciplinary and holistic. The main purpose of the IA is to ascertain the current medical, therapeutic and psychosocial needs of the client. The ensuing Care Plan then outlines the first steps to mobilise support services, internally in Spirasi and/or externally with other statutory and non-statutory bodies, to respond to those needs. In 2020 Spirasi provided 257 IAs, a decrease of 21% on the previous year.

Spirasi began a process of refining its IA procedure in 2019 which has now been completed. The pandemic has forced this particular service online and, while it presents logistical and technical difficulties for some clients, it does provide greater accessibility and will continue to be used in a post pandemic scenario where appropriate.

Therapy

Following the IA, many clients will be referred internally for therapeutic intervention. The common symptoms associated with torture are: re-experiencing, avoidance and numbing, hyper-arousal, depression, damaged self-concept, dissociation, somatic complaints, sexual dysfunction, psychosis, substance abuse and neuropsychological impairment. A total of 4915 therapy sessions (Individual/ Group, Family Therapy) were provided in 2019 which was up from 4632 in the previous year.

Family therapy was introduced in 2015 as part of a European Commission funded project in partnership with *Freedom from Torture* in London. This is already seeing significant benefits within our target group given that so many are children. New funding through AMIF (Asylum Migration and Integration Fund) was secured in 2017 and again in 2019 to continue the service up to 2022.

A commitment was made in 2017 to increase and vary the number of therapy groups to both tackle the greater numbers seeking our services and to provide a wider and more effective therapeutic response. This has been followed through in 2019 and 2020.

Our therapy has been regionalised too following the key recommendation of the Strategic Plan 2018-20. Beginning with a therapist working one day a week in Limerick this has expanded in 2019 to two days in Limerick and one day in Cork. By the end of 2020 there was a Spirasi therapist providing one day of therapy in each of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. In each location the therapist links with local NGOs who provide the important wrap-around psychosocial support.

Ideally clients and therapists should be meeting face to face and this will be the preferred option post-pandemic.

Psychosocial Support

The Psychosocial team, as well as being part of the Initial Assessment process, provides a range of supports to enable and empower Spirasi clients to access external supports and realize their rights and entitlements. This most often involves assistance in accessing legal advice, resolving issues with accommodation, support in accessing local supports and community and dealing with public services. The team currently cover two outreach activities in Baleskin and Mosney. Baleskin is the main Reception Centre in Ireland for asylum seekers in Ireland, and the psychosocial team provide an awareness session one day per week on torture and the availability of our services.

In 2020 and in the context of the pandemic where services moved online and there was no outreach in



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person to the different centre, the team provided 1152 distinct interventions.

Befriending Programme

Spirasi offers a range of volunteering opportunities across the administrative, clinical and educational areas of the organisation. This includes a very accessible and successful **befriending project** which began in 2016 and matches both clients and students with suitable befrienders who then offer ongoing support. By the end of 2020 there were 92 befriendees from 29 different countries of origin supported by our team of 71 volunteer befrienders. Our volunteer befrienders now work across 14 counties. In 2020 twenty four new volunteers were trained and thirty six new befriendees were matched to their volunteer befrienders. The support of befriendees continued despite unprecedented challenges through telephone, messaging, email and video technology.

Towards the end of 2019 year the Befriending programme, significantly, received funding from AMIF to support a salaried position for two days a week for three years until September 2022. For the first time this allowed to us plan and develop with some confidence into the future. It is hoped that the position of Befriending Officer will become a full time role in the year ahead.

Medico Legal Reports (MLRs)

With experienced assessing physicians and in the context of the pandemic Spirasi produced 61 Medico Legal Reports (MLRs) in 2020. A physician will conduct one or more detailed interviews and physical examinations of each client and then determine if the person's account is consistent with their symptoms and physical scarring. It is worth noting the increase in demand for this crucial service to both those seeking protection and to the State protection process. Spirasi will continue to advocate for more resources to meet this demand in 2021.

All of Spirasi's MLRs are completed according to the Istanbul Protocol⁹ which is the *United Nations' Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*. The pandemic, while inhibiting the carrying out of assessments as a face to face interaction is required, did provide the opportunity to produce a comprehensive and standardised guidance document for current and future Spirasi physicians.

Education

In addition to and complementing our rehabilitation work, Spirasi also provides an education service, including English language classes, IT training and art classes for asylum seekers and refugees. Over the last five years an average of just under 100 students per year have taken four Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) accredited English classes. Classes are made up of English levels 3, 4 (x2), and 5. While there is a high demand for the courses, each class is limited to an average capacity of 24 students at any given level. In addition to the QQI certified English courses, Spirasi offers Beginners and Mixed-Level classes for students who have very little or no English language skills. There is a recognition that integration into Irish life necessitates much more than English language proficiency alone. As such, Spirasi offers additional classes that complement this process which include classes in knitting and art.

Because of limited space in 213 NCR, the English Language classes were relocated to the Lantern Centre in Synge Street in January 2018. The Lantern Centre is an excellent venue with a very supportive staff. So, although the new premises has meant Spirasi has had to run its service in two distinct geographical locations - with all the inherent logistical challenges including providing a rental where none existed before - the new challenge is largely offset by the welcoming atmosphere of the Lantern and the contentedness of the students.

As with all our services in 2020 Education provision was severely impacted by the pandemic with all classes moving online from mid-March and has proven extremely challenging for teachers and students alike. Class numbers reduced to 65 students in total. Again, though, and similar to other services within the organisation,



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the move online has provided new opportunities for reaching both our existing student population and others who would not normally be able to attend given our catchment area. We hope to exploit this new reality into the future.

Training

Spirasi offers a number of training opportunities to health professionals, legal professionals, Interpreters, teachers and indeed any profession who come in contact with people who are Victims of Torture and Trauma. The training covers the following areas:

- Psychological Impact of Trauma and Torture;
- Cultural Competency;
- Working with Interpreters;
- Vicarious Trauma and Self-Care;
- Medico Legal Reports for the Protection Process

9. Challenges for 2021

Covid 19 Pandemic

Some of the impacts of the pandemic, both positive and negative, have already been outlined above. While clients continue to be supported therapeutically and psychosocially via phone and through online video conferencing technologies, face to face contact remains the preferred option for both staff and clients alike. This being the case it is likely that Spirasi will adopt a blended approach going forward, providing the face to face option where essential and an online option where appropriate. with online support also available to students, and both staff and service users are adapting and learning how to engage in this new way.

Capacity

The capacity of Spirasi for new clients is approximately 250 per year. The number of victims of torture entering the country annually is no lower than 10% and potentially as high as 50% of all international protection applicants. This means that once the annual figure of those seeking asylum goes above 2,000, Spirasi's capacity will be exceeded. Having dipped to a low of 2,244 in 2016 the numbers of asylum seekers have steadily increased to a high of 4781 in 2019. Numbers reduced significantly in 2020 due to the pandemic but there is no reason to suggest numbers won't increase again as travel restrictions are lifted. Overall then Spirasi's capacity has remained static at 250 while the demand has increased year on year leading to significantly lengthening waiting lists.

While the addition of the new Vulnerability Assessment to the Protection Process is to be welcomed overall, it will, nevertheless, further increase demand for our services. And again, while the proposals in the recent White Paper on Direct Provision are also to be welcomed, there will also be an increase in demand for the service.

Advocacy

Spirasi advocates on behalf of clients – particularly those living in Direct Provision – with the Department of Justice and Equality (DOJ&E) and the HSE and more recently with the Department of Children which recently has taken on responsibility for the accommodation of international protection applicants. Spirasi is also a member of the Asylum Support Network, a group of NGOs involved in working with Asylum Seekers across the country, which provides a forum for hearing issues, resolving and focusing advocacy with the DOJ&E and the HSE. In order to meet the extra demands being placed on the organisation the advocacy role with different Government departments in particular will need to develop so that sufficient resources are provided to enable the organisation respond adequately to the needs of our clients



Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative CLG

Funding

With the pandemic came the harsh economic reality of job losses and cuts to funding in the wider economy. Spirasi, however, was fortunate in that, unlike many other charities, its funding was not unduly effected for the remainder of 2020. We remain reasonably confident that core Government funding will remain stable for 2021. It means staff will not be laid off and we can continue to work, albeit still within the limitations of Covid 19 restrictions. The bigger challenge, outlined in the previous paragraphs, will be to increase funding to resource the organisation sufficiently to meet both the current and future demand for our services, in Dublin and regionally.

10. Complaints

There were no complaints in 2020.