



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence



POLICY ON EVACUATION/REST & COMMUNITY SUPPORT CENTRES

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Policy Owner	Head of Discipline – Water, Welfare, Vehicles & Bikes
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Approved by	Cep Carty, Principal, Civil Defence Branch
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Policy Summary	This policy outlines the context and circumstances whereby Civil Defence Volunteers may be activated to operate Evacuation Centres (ECs), Rest Centres (RCs) or Community Support Centres (CSCs).
Changes made	This policy updates and revokes the original Rest Centre policy.

Note: references to the Local Authority over-arching responsibilities, and to the storing of Evacuation Centre equipment, have yet to be confirmed. NDFEM is engaging with the Local Authorities in this regard.

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to clarify Civil Defence's role in the establishment and running of ECs, RCs & CSCs in accordance with the over-arching humanitarian response from the Emergency Management Regional Co-ordination Groups (RCG) and the National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management (NDFEM). The policy also confirms the accepted scope of any Civil Defence response, ensures a consistent approach across all Civil Defence Units, and supports inter-operability of Civil Defence Units.

This policy should be read in conjunction with *Civil Defence - Standard Operating Guidelines on Evacuation & Rest Centres*.

2. DESCRIPTION

This policy outlines the responsibilities of Civil Defence in the establishment and support of ECs, RCs & CSCs during an emergency. For clarity, the definition of each is provided below.

Evacuation centres are established to provide temporary shelter and essential support for displaced individuals, for up to 10 days. These centres will generally be in response to a localised weather or other emergency event but may also be required for wider response. Where a wider response is required, the ECs are likely to be used in parallel with other solutions, such as CSCs (see Section 2.C).

Rest Centres are established in response to isolated events that result in people having to be moved to safe accommodation for up to 48 hours approximately e.g. a fire in an apartment block, a place for family to assemble after a sudden emergency, etc.

The Local Authority Housing Section holds overall responsibility for the planning, coordination and management of these centres, including certain support roles. Day to day operation of the centre will be supported by trained volunteers from Civil Defence.

Community Support Centres, on the other hand, are facilities or premises situated within the local community that are established rapidly to support the people based in that community or a neighbouring community in a time of need. The role of the Local Authority is limited and is set out further below and in "*Community Support Centres (A Guide to Assisting Volunteer Groups in Response to an Emergency)*" which was published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in 2025.

Following engagement with the NDFEM, the following scope of services have been agreed for Civil Defence in the area of ECs, RCs & CSCs:

2.A EVACUATION CENTRES

An Evacuation Centre is a larger scale temporary facility established to provide shelter, safety and basic necessities to people who have been displaced due to emergencies such as severe weather, conflict situations, etc. Given their size, the establishment of an EC is likely to require regional (multiple Civil Defence Units) or wider support. ECs play a critical role in disaster response by helping communities stay safe and recover from emergency situations.

Overall responsibility for the establishment of an Evacuation Centre response falls under the Local Authority Housing Section. Upon activation by the Local Authority, Civil Defence will provide assistance at these centres for up to a maximum of 10 days, at which point the Local Authority Humanitarian Sub-Group is expected to have alternative arrangements in place, or take over the management of the Centre.

An effective Evacuation Centre response depends on an understanding of the ownership of various responsibilities. Responsibilities have been agreed across the following key areas:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identification of Evacuation Centre buildings• Emergency Scenarios• Civil Defence duties in ECs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health & Safety• Training• Equipment
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I. Identification of Evacuation Centre Buildings

ECs will be pre-identified and ring-fenced Local Authority/Other premises, which can be taken over at short notice in the event of an emergency. These buildings will have been assessed for accessibility, capacity, sanitation and safety. The role of identifying and monitoring these buildings falls under the Local Authority Housing Section. Civil Defence may provide assistance with assessing the suitability of these buildings when identified by the LA, and this is recommended.

II. Emergency Scenarios

Civil Defence will provide assistance with ECs for the following scenarios:

- Local Emergency (e.g. flooding that impacts a significant area.)
- Major Emergency (e.g. severe weather)
- Humanitarian Crisis (e.g. International Protection Asylum Seekers)

Assistance is provided on an “as available” basis, given the voluntary nature of the service. In support of this, Civil Defence will:

- Operate on a multi-unit basis, so that insofar as is possible, sufficient numbers will be available to run the Centre
- Publish volunteer numbers to their Local Authority on a twice-yearly basis

In common with other services, Civil Defence will not operate when Red Weather Warnings are in place.

III. Civil Defence Role/Duties

Civil Defence commit to running these centres for up to a maximum of 10 days, at which point the Local Authority Humanitarian Sub-Group is expected to have alternative arrangements in place. (The volunteer nature of Civil Defence restricts them from committing for longer periods).

In the event of an emergency, Civil Defence can assist with the following duties at an Evacuation Centre\Emergency:

- Carry out a dynamic risk assessment of the Evacuation Centre to assess if any of the documentation from the original assessment needs to be updated.
- Set-up of the Evacuation Centre
- Transport evacuees to/from Evacuation Centre
- Assist with the registration of evacuees (Note: Civil Defence will take basic details only. The Local Authority is the data owner and must take ownership of the completed registration forms).
- Assist with daytime* operation of the Evacuation Centre for up to 10 days. (Depending on the duration, this may involve rotational assistance from neighbouring units to cover the centre).
- Provision of basic essentials such as cereals, tea/coffee, bread, biscuits, disposable utensils, sanitary items, etc.
- Attend daily decision meetings with the relevant agencies involved in the operation of the centre
- Provision of First-Aid at the Evacuation Centre if required
- Closing down the Evacuation Centre and cleaning of equipment
- Storing of equipment in regional Civil Defence locations

**The Local Authority is required to have a contract in place that can be activated to provide security staff to cover nighttime operations, and the Local Authority is also required to co-ordinate with other agencies to provide translators, vulnerable person support, assistance from An Garda Siochana, and such other assistance as may be required.*

IV. Health & Safety

Buildings that are identified for use as ECs must comply with all fire, health and building safety regulations. It will be the responsibility of the Local Authority to ensure that this is in place.

A risk assessment must be completed before a decision is taken to ring-fence an Evacuation Centre for use, and this must be repeated:

- On an annual basis to ensure that the centre remains appropriate for use; and
- On the invoking of the premises for use in an emergency.

During a response, Volunteers must report hazards or safeguarding concerns immediately to their Civil Defence Officer, (CDO), Assistant Civil Defence Officer (ACDO) or Centre Manager

PPE should be used in accordance with the Standard Operating Guidelines for the operation of ECs or Medical Response

V. Training

Team Lead training in the setting up of ECs was provided on a Train the Trainer basis by Civil Defence Branch and refresher training will be delivered annually. In addition to this, it is essential that the Unit's annual multi-disciplinary training calendar includes training and equipment familiarisation exercises related to the setting up of ECs. Civil Defence volunteers will participate in this training organised by their local Civil Defence Unit. These exercises and training will ensure that the relevant volunteers are ready to respond in the event of a real-life emergency or other duty. Additional exercises may be scheduled as needed to address specific risks or operational priorities in the region.

VI. Equipment

The Local Authority/NDFEM will be responsible for funding, sourcing and replenishing of equipment for the ECs (which will be stored in designated locations and available for use across locations).

2.B REST CENTRES

Rest Centres are a scaled down version of ECs. They should be operated in exactly the same manner as Evacuation Centres but will typically be for a much shorter period of up to 48 hours, in response to an isolated incident, and will typically be somewhere for residents to take rest and relief. Each LA is required to identify a centre, or centres across the LA area, that can be used at short notice. It will typically be run by the LA CDU, but support from other LA CDUs may be invoked if required.

2.C COMMUNITY SUPPORT CENTRES

A Community Support Centre is a facility or premises situated within the local community that is established rapidly to support the people based in that community or a neighbouring community in a time of need. The centre offers services to impacted people in the community, and the services are facilitated by volunteers associated with the centre. These facilities will:

- Serve as information hubs and resource points for impacted residents
- Offer basic support services e.g. charging stations, showers, information, refreshments, etc.
- Operate separately from or in parallel with ECs.

I. Civil Defence – Community Support Centre

The intention is that CSCs will, in the main, be operated by Community Volunteer Groups in available local centres. However, in a limited number of cases, a small number of modern Civil Defence buildings may be designated as CSCs during an emergency based on the conditions listed below:

- These centres will only be activated subject to the availability of trained Civil Defence volunteers
- It should not in any way interfere with the CDO or ACDO day to day management of the Civil Defence Unit, nor the available resources available for core Civil Defence duties.
- Centres must comply with the same safety and safeguarding standards as ECs
- Civil Defence retains operational responsibility for these sites, in coordination with the Local Authority Humanitarian Subgroup

If a Civil Defence Unit wishes to operate as a CSC, it must register with the LA in the same way that other Community Groups do (as set out in the Guide referenced in Section 2 (Description)) and must nominate a team who can run the CSC **without** impacting core services in the event of an emergency.

II. Identification of CSCs

The NDFEM is putting a process in place whereby local Community Groups can apply for registration as a CSC. Civil Defence will **not** be involved in the running of **non-Civil Defence CSCs**.

3. ACTIVATION OF EC, RC & CSC

The Local/Regional Co-Ordination Groups will be responsible for identifying the need for the activation of these centres. If required they will initiate a Local Authority Humanitarian Sub-Group, which will have representatives from any Department, Agency, Utility or service that may be needed to provide support or advice to the impacted people availing of the services at the centres.

4. OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY

Overall responsibility of activation of any Centre will remain with the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage, and with the Regional/Local Co-Ordination Groups.

They will be responsible for:

- Identifying suitable Local Authority buildings for use as ECs/RCs & for registering CSCs. The LA will also be responsible for putting agreements in place to:
 - Ensure that the centre can be used as an Evacuation Centre/Rest Centre
 - Ensure that security staff can be deployed to the Evacuation Centre within 24 hours and can cover night-time management of centre
 - Ensure that meals can be sourced and provided to evacuees. Only breakfast will be managed by Civil Defence.
 - Provision of interpreters, special needs/mental health support, etc.
 - Ensure centre has suitable power supply backup
- Funding and sourcing of equipment for the ECs (which will be stored in designated locations, and available for use across locations).
- Data retention and management – it will be the responsibility of the Local Authority to take ownership of registration forms and arrange for appropriate archiving/destruction.
- Identifying alternative or long-term solutions to ensure that Civil Defence can stand down after 10 days.
- Provision of pre-determined funding codes for each emergency response

5. INDICATIVE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE STRUCTURE & CIVIL DEFENCE ROLE
 (PROVIDED FOR INFORMATION ONLY, NOT YET AGREED WITH NDFEM)

