



**Invitation to Joint Committee on Public Service, Oversight and Petitions  
Leinster House - 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2014 @ 5.30pm**

**Doras Luimní**

Who we are

What we do

Our credibility i.e. our work in the specific areas (A) Invisible Children; (B) Anti-trafficking office

Our ask on DP

**Issues**

- Private Contractors
- DP and Children
- DP and Victims of Trafficking

**Summary**

- The Direct Provision (DP) system was introduced in November 1999 and was intended to accommodate asylum seekers for a duration of 6 months at most
- It has no legislative basis
- There are 34 DP Centres across the country mostly run by private contractors in former hotels, hostels or boarding schools, prefabricated buildings, convents or mobile homes.
- There are 4,324 people living in the DP system, of which one third (1,529) are children (RIA stats June 2014)
- Almost 40% of residents are single persons
- Asylum seekers are not allowed to work, unlike in most other European Countries
- The average length of time spent in DP is 4 years
- 25% of people living in DP have been there for 6 years or more
- 9% of residents have been in the system over 7 years.
- Totally unsuitable and dehumanising living conditions
- Often overcrowded living conditions, with families sharing one single room; single adults sharing a dormitory style room with up to 8 people; families sharing rooms with other families.
- Food is served at set times, often with few exceptions.
- Reports of expired food, unsuitable food, re-heated leftovers regularly served.
- Rationing of basic goods such as toilet rolls, shampoo, soap etc.
- Broken and damaged equipment and facilities.
- Limited recreational/ living areas, some have only canteen for 'communal' area.
- Limited or no internet access.
- Often lack of or limited transport to village/ town/ city centre.
- Damaging effects on mental health for residents

**Children**

- One third of all asylum seekers living in Direct Provision (DP) in Ireland are children.
- Social services have been alerted to more than 1,500 child protection or welfare concerns over young people living in centres for asylum seekers over the past five years (three to four times more than reported concerns about young people in the general community).

- The issues investigated by child protection staff include inappropriate sexualised behaviour among children, the inability of parents to cope and young people not being supervised.
- Authorities have been alerted to numerous cases of inappropriate sexual contact between adults and young people.
- Children share bathrooms with unrelated adult men and women.
- Children and teenagers share bedrooms with their entire family.
- Children are often exposed to violent and sexual behaviour.
- Long stays can lead to poor mental health and psychological developmental issues.
- Children live in confined spaces.
- Lack of fresh nutritious food, such as vegetables and fruit, leading to risk of malnutrition.
- No child benefit for asylum seeker children.
- Witnessing and fear of deportation harms psychological development.
- Little access to play areas and/or preschool facilities.
- Children cannot invite their friends to play at DP centres.
- In 2013, the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) dealt with complaints concerning children living in Direct Provision, despite the lack of clarity regarding its jurisdiction in the area of asylum and immigration. "The Department of Justice and Equality has not accepted that the OCO can address these as cases within the statutory complaints-handling framework of the Ombudsman for Children Act." [See OCO Annual Report 2013 for further details here: <http://www.oco.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/AnnualReport2013.pdf>]
- Removed parents rights (as enshrined in Constitution) to parent – to cook, clean, shop, serve as a role model
- Children are denied a proper childhood while living in direct provision - Institutionalisation of Children
- Children are not entitled to Universal Child Benefit (for the 3% in DP)
- Children –limited play space; study space; not able to access local recreational facilities (e.g. swimming classes or access to leisure centres)
- Ombudsman for Children should have remit to cover children in DP
- Separated young people should not be placed in DP

### **Private contractors**

- Ireland has paid over €850 million to private contractors for accommodating asylum seekers since 2000; €62 million paid in 2012; €55 million paid in 2013
- Many of these private contractors have previous experience in property development, hotel and hostel management. They are required under contract to provide bed and board, as well as complying with food hygiene and health-and-safety laws only.
- Quality of care and services varies largely across the board.
- At least five of the larger firms have beneficial owners in offshore jurisdictions such as the British Virgin Islands and the Isle of Man.
- Many of the contractors own multiple DP centres, with some having received over €100 million in state funding for accommodation services.
- Centre staff do not have specific skills or training to respond to complex emotional and legal needs presented from residents.
- Some contractors have moved to unlimited company status and therefore have no obligation to publish account information.
- Details of individual contracts are not publically available. Names of companies who have been privately contracted for 2013 are available on page 25 of RIA Annual Report here: <http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/Pages/Statistics>.
- We call for a review of all private contracts on at least a three year basis
- No independent inspections (suggest something along lines of HIQA)
- Publicity of those who are not meeting contractual obligations.

## Victims of Trafficking

- DP (group institutional and not specialist accommodation) not suitable for victims of trafficking as further potential for sexual exploitation
- Safe and appropriate housing is an internationally agreed priority need for victims, which is central to their recovery and to fulfilling their role as witnesses for prosecutions
- Confidentiality and security are an issue
- Placed in mixed centres and often have to share with other strangers. No privacy and time to recover
- A widely publicised report by AkidWa in 2010 concluded that the direct provision system is inadequate for catering for women who have been subjected to rape, sexual violence and other types of violence because of its lack of gender sensitivity
- GRETA Report Concerning the Implementation of the CoE Convention by Ireland (2013) - urged the Irish authorities to *'review the policy of accommodating suspected victims of trafficking in accommodation centres for asylum seekers and to consider the setting up of specialised shelters for victims of trafficking, with the involvement of NGOs as support providers'*. GRETA recommended that all victims regardless of their nationality, EU or Non-EU, were 'housed within a similar type setting, which is separate from the immigration system but rather responds to the abuse they have sustained'.
- There are appropriate and experienced accommodation service providers in the State for vulnerable groups. Victims of trafficking should also be considered a vulnerable group in need of safe and appropriate accommodation