Cultur Migrant Centre

Submission to the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process

28 February 2020

Cultur Migrants Centre

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Cultur Migrants Centre Position on Direct Provision

"The current system of DP is not fit for purpose and was not designed for long term living. It is unjust and we will continue to campaign and call for change in how applicants of the international protection process are accommodated. We believe there needs to be a shift of minds and a total transformation to improve the quality of life for those seeking asylum in Ireland and the protection system itself".

Submission to the Advisory Group on the Protection Process Introduction

This submission was developed by resident leaders in Mosney and supported by Cultúr Migrants Centre.

Cultur welcomes the Advisory Group's decision to invite submissions from community groups working with people in the International Protection Process. We view it as an important step and opportunity in the process to allow the voices of Asylum Seekers to be listened to and acted upon. This submission we envisage would be discussed and would inform the deliberations of the Advisory group. As we appreciate and value the inputs of all the members, groups, individuals, we would expect the same from them in respecting and taking cognisance of the issues raised by asylum seekers themselves.

Mosney Accommodation Centre: local context

The Mosney Accommodation Centre in Co. Meath is one of the largest centres in Ireland. It currently accommodates approximately 698 people of whom 51.8% (362) are children under 18 years of age. (November 2019 Mosney figures). The centre is located near a busy main road and is cut off from the local community in an area of East Meath that has experienced a large population growth not matched by the level of services and supports from community, voluntary and statutory agency. Although Mosney is located geographically in Co. Meath, its hinterland is Drogheda Co. Louth and is where most of those living in the centre would gravitate towards for services. Children attend schools in Meath and Louth and very little contact exists between the non-formal education and youth services that exist in local areas and young people in Mosney.

What are the main challenges that you have experienced during your stay in Direct Provision?

Asylum Seekers are a marginalised group they face challenges throughout their stay in direct provision such as;

Poverty: parents in Direct Provision often struggle to buy/rent books and uniforms. Additionally, they do not have the pocket money or extra money for their children to participate in school trips or afterschool activities which often take place within school time. The rate of €38.80 per week and the back to school allowance is not enough. Child benefit should be universal for all children.

Mental health issues and other health issues are prevalent in direct provision as a direct result of institutional living e.g. not being able to work, not knowing your future and feelings of hopelessness and desperation from all the years of being kept in limbo. Dietary issues resulting from unhealthy foods (chips and sausages everyday as an afterschool snack, for example) resulting in childhood obesity or children have suffered from malnourishment resulting in poor health.

Dignity and Privacy of Family Life is denied in direct provision: Overcrowding to the extent that children share rooms with every person in their family, including their parents, is not in the best interest of the developing child, especially those reaching adolescence. Children over 10 years should not be sharing rooms with siblings and parents of same or opposite gender. The tensions and pressures on family and parental relationships have in some cases resulted in family break ups and access to privacy is extremely difficult in close living quarters.

Discrimination and Stigma: Children in DP face the stigma of living in a 'hostel' this results in low self-esteem and has led to bullying in school in some cases. Children from Mosney arrive on the bus from Mosney and are clearly identifiable as living in direct provision. They are not treated equally as other children are when they leave 2nd level education and are not facilitated to attend 3rd level, thus not being able to achieve their potential with their peers.

How can living conditions and quality of life in Direct Provision centres be improved?

The current system of DP is not fit for purpose and was not designed for long term living. It is unjust and inhumane we will continue to campaign and call for an end of the system we believe there needs to be a shift of minds and a total transformation to improve the quality of life for those seeking asylum in Ireland and the protection system itself. In the interim however we like to see **an immediate change in the following areas:**

Child safety and protection: children should have adequate playing and sleeping spaces and the parents should be allowed to parent their children in an uncontrolled environment. Living in an open centre and being able to protect children presents challenges as often you do not know who you are living beside or those who come to work in centres.

The length of time for those coming into direct provision should be time bound limited to 6 months: a 2014 research report on children's needs in Co. Meath stated that: "Given that 90% of asylum seekers suffer from depression after six months in direct

provision, the needs of the children residing in (direct provision) should be considered particularly with regard to recreational and mental health issues."(*An Audit of Services and Needs Analysis of Children's Services, Meath Children's Services Committee Report, 2014)*

Living arrangements: No more than two adults per room where adults must share, to avoid religious, gender, intercultural and ethnic diversity issues. Management should respond to complaints of this nature swiftly.

Training of staff-All centres should have trained staff who undergo integration and anti-racism training and other relevant people management training

All centres should meet best quality standards and be independently assessed by the Health Information and Quality Standards Authority like other residential institutions in the state.

Dedicated advocates including community and voluntary organisations to be allowed open access to all centres to ensure that residents have the same level of supports as the wider community and resources should be made available to relevant community and voluntary organisations to provide this support.

Tell us how supports (e.g. financial, educational, health) provided to asylum seekers, both inside and outside the Direct Provision system, could be improved.

1. **Short term (up to 1 year)**

Access to accredited training services SOLAS (formerly FÁS) and ETB courses for those over 18 who have been in the system for 12 months or more and to end the current restrictions for asylum seekers

Access to the labour market for **ALL** those who have been in the system over 9 months

Supported self-catering facilities-residents should be able to prepare their own meals. It is happening in some centres but should be extended to all

Direct provision allowance to be increased in line with the rate of inflation.

2. Medium Term (within 18 months)

An information and financial package should be made available to support those who are in transition from direct provision to life in the community. In this case there is an onus on state agencies to engage directly with centres to ensure that all the relevant supports are in place so those leaving direct provision are clear about the supports available to them, are clear about their rights and entitlements and can navigate the relevant services. We are concerned that many people leave direct provision are institutionalised and are unaware of the systems and procedures. In Co. Meath the lack of affordable accommodation has resulted in number residents who received permission to

remain returning to Mosney or remaining on for several months due to the lack of affordable accommodation, no deposit and often no references.

How have you experienced the asylum application process? Suggest ways it could be improved.

"For most residents in Mosney who are now at the end of the application process and ours has been a tiresome and painful journey. In a new Asylum and Protection system we would like to see the following in place in the application process:

- **Early legal advice based on best practice and human rights principles** to ensure those applying for asylum has the best advice and supports in making their application. This would save time in the system and resources of the state.

Conclusion Cultur would like to see all recommendations on DP that have come from previous and this working group implemented swiftly in the short term. In the medium term we would like to see an overhaul of the Asylum and Protection system and real reform of the asylum process in Ireland.

This would require short, medium- and long-term solutions:

1. A reformed reception system for those who arrive to Ireland of no longer than 3-6 months with an independent monitoring by HIQA. Centres should be run on a not for profit basis with models from other countries examined on how best to do this
2. All Asylum seekers given the right to work after a period in the country after 9 months to avoid deskilling and loss of educational attainment
3. The right to early legal advice and supports in making an application for asylum
4. Clearing of the backlog of current applications
5. Community, voluntary and statutory agencies be supported and resourced to work directly with asylum seekers to ensure the realisation of their rights, address the inequalities they experience as a result of the system of DP and support their social inclusion within the local communities in which they live with their families in dignity.

We welcome the invitation to the consultation process by the Advisory Group. **Contact person** for this submission: Reuben Hambakachere, community worker Cultúr. reuben@cultur.ie 046 9093120 or 0861994655

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