

DIRECT PROVISION

‘Making a killing’

Metro Éireann, 28 November – 03 December 2008

Housing asylum seekers can be a lucrative sideshow for Irish businesspeople, and some have been accused of cutting costs to enhance profit margins

ASYLUM SEEKERS began coming to Ireland in significant numbers at the beginning of this decade, peaking at over 12,000 for 2002.

To cope with this phenomenon, the Irish Government chose a system of ‘direct provision’, whereby applicants for asylum would live at designated premises with meals provided – and without permission to work – while their claims were processed. Contracts are out-sourced to private operators by the Department of Justice’s Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), and for some, this had proven lucrative.

Mosney in Co Meath, owned by businessman Phelim McCloskey, is one of the bigger facilities. Its turnover for 2006 was €8,660,127, while the profit for that year, after providing for depreciation and taxation, was €633,612.

Mosney, which can accommodate over 800 residents, is generally described as one of the better-run facilities but has, along with other centres, come in for criticism.

In June, the Newbridge Asylum Seekers Support Group (NASSG) raised health concerns over the toothpaste bought in by management at the Eyre Powell hostel. The RIA, however, indicated that the toothpaste was sourced through a reputable supplier and presented no adverse health affects.

Mick Power of the NASSG, speaking to *Metro Éireann* at the time, said the issue was part of a wider problem. “The core of what we are saying to the RIA for the past God knows how long is that the system is wrong – the less food they eat, the more the profit for the operators.”

Sometimes, it must be added, protests at asylum seeker centres can be seen in the context of the social situation of the residents. Not allowed to work, many go stir crazy, and getting involved in disputes over food and conditions is a way of blowing off some steam.

This article was produced in association with the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS)