

DIRECT PROVISION

“No plans to review direct provision-Justice Dept”

Metro Éireann, 28 November – 03 December 2008

BELOW, the Department of Justice responds to our questions on the burning issues regarding direct provision:

Metro Éireann: How much did direct provision cost the State in 2007, and how much is projected for 2008?

Department of Justice: The cost to the State for the provision of such accommodation in the year 2007 was €83.262m.

This expenditure included such services as pre-school services, utilities, transporting asylum seekers throughout the country under the system of dispersal, and miscellaneous expenditure. The likely expenditure outcome for the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) in 2008 is €89.810m.

ME: Asylum seekers and campaigners are calling for the system to be scrapped because it breaches their human rights, including the right to education. Do you have any plans to review the system?

DJ: The direct provision system is fully in accordance with all national and international human rights obligations. Indeed, the system is on a par with, if not superior to, any system of accommodation for asylum seekers elsewhere in the EU.

ME: Many people in direct provision are qualified professionals who could be beneficial to this country during the present recession if they are allowed to work. Are there any plans to review the employment ban for asylum seekers so that they could contribute to society?

DJ: It is not proposed to allow asylum applicants to take up paid employment pending a final decision being made on their applications.

ME: It is several years now since the Government started paying an allowance to adult asylum seekers. Is there any possibility that this, as well as child benefit for asylum seeking children/children of asylum seekers could be reviewed upwards?

DJ: The Direct Provision system seeks to ensure that the accommodation and ancillary services provided by the State meet the requirements of asylum seekers in the period during which their applications for asylum are being processed.

This system provides asylum seekers with full board accommodation free of utility or other costs. In addition to meeting these basic living costs, a direct provision allowance of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child was introduced some years ago.

The direct provision allowance seeks to reflect the value of the above-mentioned services to the asylum seeker, and there are no plans to increase the allowance.

ME: Is there any reason why people are being regularly expelled from direct provision centres? We understand that at least 10 asylum seekers are affected every year.

DJ: The RIA provides accommodation for just under 7,000 asylum seekers at present, covering 94 nationalities. The system provides a safe environment, secure from worry about the need for food, shelter, health supports and education for their children. A very small percentage of asylum seekers behave in a manner which suggests that they have no desire to be provided with this safe support. In a rare number of cases, such persons take it upon themselves to threaten the safety of their fellow residents, the staff at the centres, community welfare officers, health service providers and the local community which has embraced them.

All persons accommodated by the RIA are informed about what is expected of residents and what is unacceptable. The RIA cannot force persons to comply with these rules and procedures, but makes every effort to highlight, at an early stage, any breaches which may lead to a resident jeopardising the benefits of direct provision.

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