

WHAT IS DIRECT PROVISION?

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THE INTERNATIONAL
PROTECTION
PROCEDURE IN
IRELAND

MANAGEMENT OF
DIRECT PROVISION

ISSUES OF DIRECT
PROVISION

STAND
FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN



USI
Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

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The International Protection Procedure in Ireland

Q. What is international protection?

A. International protection refers to the protection given by a government to someone who has left another country to escape harm. International protection applicants (often referred to as asylum seekers) are people who are waiting for authorities to decide on their applications to be recognised as refugees or granted protection.

Q. What is direct provision?

A. The direct provision system was established in 2000 to house and provide essential services for international protection applicants entering Ireland. It was initially described as an “interim” system to provide accommodation for a six-month period while people awaited an outcome on their application. It has instead become a system where people are trapped in limbo for years, often in overcrowded conditions, without adequate facilities and supports. Those in direct provision receive weekly allowance rates of €38.80 per adult and €29.80 per child.

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The International Protection Procedure in Ireland

Q. How many people are living in direct provision centres?

A. At the beginning of 2020, there were 7,667 people seeking protection in Ireland. Of these, 1,524 people were living in emergency accommodation (1).

Q. How long are people spending in direct provision?

A. The last official statistics published by the RIA was in November 2018. They demonstrate that the average duration of stay by applicants in state provided accommodation is 23 months. However, 15.8% of people are spending between 2 to 3 years, 13.8% between 3 and 4 years and 4.7% of people between 4 and 5 years. 2.5% of people have been in the system for more than 7 years (2).

04 1 Ombudsman (2020), The Ombudsman & Direct Provision: Update for 2019. Available here.

2 Department of Justice + Equality (2018), Reception and Integration Agency Monthly Report November 2018. Available here.

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Management of Direct Provision

Only three of the 47 direct provision centres were built for purpose. The rest are an amalgamation of holiday parks, convents, nursing homes, hotels, hostels and caravan parks. This means that few have any self-catering facilities. The vast majority of centers are contracted out to for-profit businesses to manage day-to-day responsibility of centres. Many of these companies are registered as unlimited and therefore not required to submit accounts while others, like Mosney Direct Provision Centre in Co Meath are owned by offshore firms, meaning profits are not part of the public domain. In its 20 years, the state has given a total of €1.3 billion to contractors running direct provision sites (3).

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Issues of Direct Provision

The Legal Process

Application processing, and specifically wait times, is one of the most significant issues continuously raised with direct provision. The system is not designed with the capacity to deal with the problems arising as a result of people spending many years in the accommodation centres. The amount of time people spend in direct provision compounds the existence of all other problems. The legal infrastructure of the asylum process in Ireland is often described as dysfunctional (4). The vast majority of people do not get legal advice early on in their application process. Good quality and neutral interpreters are vital to a fair system, however, access is not always guaranteed.

Education

Protection applicants in Ireland have to pay non-EU fees for third level education with only a small number of grants and private scholarships available. Therefore, upon completion of secondary school people in DP can not continue their studies and only a small number in conditioned circumstances are allowed to enter the workforce. .

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Issues of Direct Provision

Accommodation Standards and Facilities

There is a severe lack of facilities on-site to support people's physical, mental and emotional needs. With all of the centres near capacity, issues of overcrowding have been further emphasised with the Covid-19 crisis. For children and students, this lack of facilities includes suitable study, homework and play areas. Tightly regulated mealtimes add to an institutional setting, with a lack of cooking facilities and a quality of food that is often considered to be below par.

Transport is an additional issue in terms of accessing necessary facilities outside of centres, as well as cost. At the moment people also have to make long and very difficult journeys to attend interviews and other business related to their asylum claims. There have been cases where people have had no way to get back to remote centres by public transport.

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Issues of Direct Provision

Right to Work

In 2018, the government put into effect the EU Reception Conditions directive which gives certain protection applicants the right to work. A blanket ban which prevented access to the workforce was deemed unconstitutional in 2017. However, accessing employment is incredibly complicated.

There are many barriers in place to obtaining a driving license and so people must find work in the local area unless it's well serviced by public transport, which is rare. With so many DP centres located in rural areas, job opportunities are few. You must also be in Ireland for at least nine months and awaiting the first decision on your application.

Employment permits also only last six months. Such barriers have the potential to leave people in direct provision vulnerable to labour and sexual exploitation.

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Issues of Direct Provision

Healthcare

As a result of the above issues, Direct Provision accommodation can have serious negative impacts on people's right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. This can be especially inappropriate and inhumane for certain vulnerable individuals, such as people with mental health problems, or victims of sexual violence, torture or human trafficking, where institutionalised living can exacerbate trauma and psychological difficulties.

LGBTI people may be at particular risk and require specialised supports not available near many centres. Women, girls and other people who can become pregnant can face barriers in accessing the reproductive healthcare they need when they need it.

**TAKE PART IN THE
CAMPAIGN!**

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Educational experiences are not equal for everyone in Ireland - particularly for those applying for international protection in Ireland's Direct Provision system. We're calling on student, student representatives and friends to get involved in the 'Migrant Minds Matter' campaign and take action to promote access to third-level education for all. To get involved please visit: 10000students.ie for more information or contact 10000students@stand.ie.