



PRESS RELEASE

23<sup>th</sup> April 2020

## **Doras Welcomes Ombudsman report on Direct Provision, Expresses Disappointment with Department of Justice and Equality Response**

### **Ombudsman's Report**

We welcome the Ombudsman's report on Direct Provision in 2019, as well as the important and timely reference to the Covid-19 pandemic. It serves to further highlight how unsuitable a system it is for receiving International Protection Applicants in Ireland.

"This report reinforces what many non-governmental organisations, community groups and individuals have been stating for a number of years - that the system of Direct Provision is wholly unsuitable and inappropriate for anything other than short-stay accommodation for International Protection Applicants. Furthermore, the ongoing use of emergency hotel style accommodation for over 18 months is also inappropriate. We have been working with people from a number of the so-called 'emergency accommodation' settings and the issues with many of them are very concerning," said John Lannon, Doras Director.

### **Covid-19 Response in Direct Provision**

The Covid-19 pandemic highlights how the warehousing of people in overcrowded institutional settings leaves those within the system in extremely precarious positions. We recognise that these are unprecedented times, however, current 'thinning' measures being carried out by IPAS to reduce the number of people in the direct provision centers remain inadequate as people still have to share bedroom spaces, bathrooms and communal areas. The Ombudsman also raised this concern in his report, noting that "rooms are frequently shared by three or more people" he said he believed that at the very least rooms housing more than two people should not be used, and that unrelated people should not be expected to share rooms for an extended time."

The manner in which many people were transferred during the thinning process was inadequate. The #MoveTheVulnerableOut campaign which was supported by Doras called for IPAS to ensure the safety of those most at risk from Covid-19, as per HSE guidelines, in late March.

"Soon after the #MoveTheVulnerableOut call, IPAS began the transfer of people to newly opened centres, often in different counties. There was no consultation about who should move, and no consideration given to people who did not want to transfer. Furthermore, Centre management who are not necessarily trained to make such decisions were asked to identify vulnerable people who might need to be isolated and to highlight them to IPAS," said Lannon.

### **Department of Justice and Equality response to Ombudsman's report**

We are disappointed by elements of the statement released by the Department of Justice and Equality on 23rd April, in response to the Ombudsman's report, specifically the claim that "much of the use of emergency accommodation could be eliminated if the more than 1,000 people who have been granted permission to remain in the State but continue to reside in Direct Provision accommodation could relocate into mainstream accommodation." (DoJE Statement, 23 April 2020)

“The Department of Justice and Equality continue to shift the burden of responsibility for the use of what they refer to as ‘emergency accommodation’ on to people with permission to remain. In most cases they are unable to secure private rental accommodation and leave Direct Provision,” said Lannon. “Ongoing housing shortages, as well as more recent restrictions due to Covid-19, make it extremely difficult to secure appropriate housing for families and individuals. Delays in providing ministerial decision letters to international protection applicants in cases where the International Protection Office has made a recommendation is a further contributory factor.”

Doras, as well as a number of other NGO's, have asked the Department to facilitate an accelerated process for HAP applications, and the issuing of GNIB cards to those that have been granted permission to remain, to enable them to move out of Direct Provision once appropriate housing can be secured.

Doras has continuously advocated for a human rights based, non-profit system for accommodating International Protection Applicants, that is informed by ongoing vulnerability and needs assessments of residents. “We concur with the ombudsman’s recommendation that the key principles of independent living and reasonable living space set out in both the McMahon report and in the Department’s National Standards should be adhered to when accommodating international protection applicants,” said John Lannon.

**ENDS**

For further media information please contact Brian Vandamme | [b.vandamme@doras.org](mailto:b.vandamme@doras.org) |