



Press Release

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NGOs Call for Action on HIQA Monitoring of Direct Provision Centres

International protection applicant support organisations Doras, Nasc and the Irish Refugee Council have called for clarity on the timeline and scope of implementation of independent monitoring of Direct Provision centres by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).

The three organisations have written to Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman about the increasingly difficult circumstances being faced by people living in Direct Provision and IPAS emergency accommodation centres. They have highlighted the urgent need to safeguard vulnerable people and implement the promised independent monitoring, oversight and human rights-focused inspections.

Independent monitoring of IPAS accommodation was due to come into effect in January this year, following publication of National Standards for Accommodation Centres in 2019. In October 2020, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth announced that HIQA would undertake independent monitoring. To date, this has not happened.

“We remain concerned at the ongoing delays in establishing independent monitoring and inspections by HIQA,” said John Lannon, CEO of Doras. “We welcome comments from Minister Roderic O’Gorman in May that agreement has been reached with HIQA in principle. However, we have also been told that HIQA is not expected to undertake its independent monitoring role until the end of this year. In addition, the Minister also said in May that it has not yet been determined whether legislative change will be required to put this in place. This uncertainty is worrying, given the dire ongoing need for inspections in direct provision centres.”

To underline the need for immediate progress on establishing an independent human rights-based monitoring, oversight and inspection system, Doras, Nasc and the Irish Refugee Council have brought a number of issues to the Minister’s attention. Of primary concern are ongoing mental health issues, including widespread difficulties accessing services, leading to some protection applicants reporting suicide ideation and/or attempting suicide.

Poor living conditions in Direct Provision and emergency accommodation centres, including dirty floors in rooms people were moved to, dirty water, lack of hot water, and poor food quality have also been highlighted.

“HIQA reported in March 2021 that residents and staff of accommodation centres for international protection applicants and programme refugees presented with an increased risk of infection of Covid-19,” said Fiona Finn, CEO of Nasc. “The absence of independent monitoring, oversight and human rights-based inspections of IPAS accommodation centres has contributed to an already dysfunctional system that does not meet Ireland’s human rights obligations. Vulnerable people remain hidden and isolated from the support services they need, often in sub-standard conditions.”

“While implementing independent inspections of existing accommodation centres is not an alternative to delivering a human rights compliant system of reception and accommodation,” said Nick Henderson, CEO of the Irish Refugee Council, “it is important that people’s lives are not left in limbo until the White Paper is delivered on.”

The three organisations are calling on the Minister and his Department to indicate the scope of the agreement that will be put in place with HIQA in relation to Direct Provision, and outline their role and the type of inspections and follow-up HIQA will undertake. They have also asked for clarification of the timeline for their involvement in monitoring and improving the quality of services, including health and social care services, in Direct Provision.

“We would also welcome an outline of the interim measures that will be put in place to ensure the safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children between now and such time that HIQA’s role in independent monitoring, oversight and inspections is formalised.” said John Lannon.

ENDS

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