



[PRESS RELEASE]

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For immediate release

Women's NGO calls on Government to address safety issues and gender inequalities for asylum seekers in state care.

SPEAKING AT THE launch of *Am Only Saying it Now: Experiences of Women Seeking Asylum in Ireland* at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin Castle today, Salome Mbugua urged the Government to act upon her recommendations for review and reform of the asylum system in Ireland, particularly the system of 'direct provision' care.

The report, compiled by the migrant women's organization AkiDwA, examines the issues faced by women who are in direct provision state care while awaiting decisions on their asylum, protection and leave to remain applications.

Salome Mbugua, AkiDwA director and author of the report explained;

"the safety and security of women and their children is paramount. Women living in direct provision can be vulnerable, isolated and excluded from mainstream society" [and we must ensure that their rights are protected and needs met]

There are almost 3,000 women and girls living in direct provision in 52 centres located throughout the country. The majority of women have been living in these centres for two years or more.

The report draws upon the experiences and testimony of 121 women living in 10 direct provision centres around the country. The majority of centres are run on behalf of the State by private companies.

The report's findings highlight the lack of appropriate personnel, training, vetting and set standards for individuals working with vulnerable women and with children in Ireland's reception and asylum system. It also looks at the impact of long stays in direct provision on women's and children's health and psychological well-being. The report explores the difficulties of parenting within the direct provision system and difficulties for the women in accessing support services and in having their

concerns and complaints heard. Women participating in the research reported incidences of harassment, violence and abuse directed at female asylum seekers in Ireland's reception and asylum system.

The report also found that overcrowding in centres, outdated or unsuitable buildings, the security and safety concerns of women and children, lack of accessible, independent and transparent complaints procedures, poor management and racism may all have contributed to further distress and serious health issues for the women and children living in these centres.

Speaking at the launch of the report Catherine Joyce of Barnardos said that her organization is **“concerned about the impact the direct provision system is having on children. They live in situations that can represent significant child protection risks”**

Rosemary Byrne, of the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC), spoke at the launch, saying **“living in direct provision over a long period can have a negative impact on the wellbeing of women and children asylum seekers and family life is often interrupted.”** She stated that, **“the IHRC would welcome a review of the current system”**.

The report calls for the implementation of Gender guidelines in the asylum policy and reception system, and makes a number of recommendations for Government including:

- An independent audit of the government's policy on direct provision
- Creating a transparent, independent and confidential complaints mechanism in direct provision
- Requiring all centre staff to undergo mandatory training and Garda vetting on issues relating
- Creating separate women-only supportive accommodation, especially for victims of sexual and gender based violence and trafficking.

Speaking about the recommendations for Government Ms. Mbugua said **“the government must ensure that there is training and codes of conduct for personnel and that people working with these vulnerable women and children are properly vetted.”**

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