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Quick Links

20th March 2018	2
Asylum Seeker Accommodation	2
Asylum Seeker Accommodation	2
Asylum Seeker Accommodation	3
Migrant Integration.....	4
Refugee Data	5
Travel Documents.....	6
Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration.....	6
Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration.....	7
Work Permits Data	7
Asylum Support Services.....	8
Migrant Integration.....	8
21st March 2018	9
Direct Provision Data.....	9

20th March 2018

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

297. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** if RIA has a fit and proper persons' test for organisations or persons that run direct provision centres on behalf of RIA. [11803/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): All accommodation service providers are obliged to provide the services outlined in the relevant contract for services.

To ensure this is happening, my Department oversees a system of inspection of centres. These inspections are carried out at random and usually happen three times a year.

All payments based on the contract are made through the existing payments facilities which include checks with the Revenue Commissioners for ongoing tax compliance.

In addition to the foregoing, all staff in centres must undergo Garda Vetting before they can work in the centre and equally must abide by the Code of Practice for staff.

Training on Children First legislation is provided by qualified staff from my Department to all local staff.

RIA staff hold regular clinics in each accommodation centre to hear and address any concerns raised by residents. Complaints in relation to any issue that may arise should in the first instance be raised with local management or directly with RIA or directly with either the Ombudsman or Ombudsman for Children as appropriate.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

298. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the consultation process provided for local communities as a general policy regarding the development of direct provision centres. [11804/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The sourcing of new accommodation centres for those persons seeking international protection is done by way of either an expression of interest published in the national press and EU Journal by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department, or a public procurement process which is advertised on E-Tenders and the Official Journal of the European Union and managed by the Office of Government Procurement on behalf of RIA.

All proposed premises must be inspected and assessed as to their suitability. The criteria for assessment is based on quality of premises, general conformity with the recommendations of the McMahon Report, and the availability of services such as schools, general practitioners, post office

etc. Once a premises is offered to RIA and has been deemed suitable following an inspection, negotiations with the proposed service provider are carried out.

During the assessment and prior to the conclusion of the negotiations, the local authority is consulted to see if there are any legal or compliance issues in relation to the property. Following the conclusion of negotiations, all local councillors and local members of the Oireachtas are contacted. It is not appropriate to commence this consultation process prior to this as it is not guaranteed that a centre will open until these negotiations are complete.

Once a premises is established, the Reception and Integration Agency establishes a local liaison group (as recommended in the McMahon Report) called the Friends of the Centre Group. RIA also work with the local State service providers to address any issues as they arise.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

299. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** if he has satisfied himself that the local community in Lisdoonvarna, County Clare was adequately consulted regarding the proposed direct provision centre to be located there. [11805/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): On 8 January 2018, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press and EC Journal.

This call sought expressions of interest from parties who would be interested in providing accommodation and related services on a urgent and emergency basis. This was issued in response to the urgent and unforeseen demand for accommodation and related services from such persons arriving in the State seeking international protection. The closing date for receipt of expressions of interest was the 28 January 2018.

In total, just under 20 premises were offered to the Department of which 11 were made available for inspection. The criteria against which the Department assessed the offers of accommodation were availability, standard of property, ability to provide communal social spaces for residents, ability to cater at mealtimes and proximity to required services such as schools, shops, post office etc.

It should be noted that these premises were offered to the Department by individual contractors across the country. The Department did not randomly choose any one location over another location.

Following on-site assessments carried out by staff in the Department, the offer of the King Thomond Hotel in Lisdoonvarna was deemed to be the most suitable premises offered to the Department. The premises was available, decorated to a high standard, capable of delivering the required services, has scope to provide the required communal social areas required by residents and is located close to a town with both primary and secondary schools, shops and a post office.

As with every other accommodation centre in the country, my Department works closely with the HSE and Departments of Education and Skills and Employment Affairs and Social Protection and all other relevant Government Departments and Agencies to coordinate the delivery of State services to residents.

Contractual discussions with the contractor concluded on Friday 16 February. On Tuesday 20 February, local politicians and members of the Oireachtas were advised of the development and invited to a meet with RIA staff on the following Friday. That meeting became a public meeting from which the community in Lisdoonvarna submitted two lists of additional queries addressing medical, educational, community and social issues. A full response to those queries has been issued.

I understand that there has been significant interest from the local community in getting involved with the residents of the centre through the 'Friends of the Centre' model and my Department will continue to engage with the Friends of the Centre to provide support and address any issues that may arise.

Migrant Integration

322. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the local authorities that have and have not active migrant integration strategies in place, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12190/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I have no responsibility in relation to the actions of Local Authorities. However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have sought the relevant information from the Local Government Management Agency. A recent survey was undertaken of the 31 Local Authorities week beginning 12 March 2018, all 31 responded. Ten Local Authorities have confirmed that they have a migrant integration strategy.

These are:

Carlow County Council

Dublin City Council

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council

Galway County Council

Kerry County Council

Kildare County Council

Kilkenny County Council

Limerick City and County Council

Mayo County Council

South Dublin County Council.

21 Local Authorities have stated they do not have a migrant integration strategy, in addition Local Authorities are addressing migrant integration and wider social inclusion through their Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP).

The development of Local Authority integration strategies will be undertaken within the framework of the National Strategy. Action 52 of the Migrant Integration Strategy - A Blueprint for the future, which was published on 7 February 2017, provides for the updating of integration strategies by local authorities over the lifetime of the Strategy i.e. from 2017 to 2020. A Monitoring and Co-ordination Committee has been established to support the process of implementing the Migrant Integration Strategy. The Committee, which comprises representatives of relevant Government Departments, State Agencies and the NGO sector, met for the third time in January 2018 and are due to meet again in May 2018. Progress on the implementation of the actions in the Strategy will be reviewed at the end of 2018 and a report prepared for Government.

Refugee Data

338. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the number of persons that have been welcomed into the State under the refugee protection programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12352/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. The IRPP is managed from within the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) and has responsibility for both the programme refugee resettlement strand and the asylum seeker relocation strand of the Programme.

Since the IRPP was established in 2015, 792 people have been welcomed to Ireland under the programme refugee resettlement strand and 888 people under the asylum seeker relocation strand. Several hundred more people will arrive in Ireland, from both strands, in the coming weeks and months.

Calais Special Project:

The Tusla Separated Children Seeking Asylum Team coordinates and leads the Calais Special Project (CSP). Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) admitted through the CSP are granted programme refugee status and form part of the IRPP. To date, 41 young people have been admitted under the CSP.

A further 6 UAMs have also arrived from Greece under the relocation strand who are in the care of Tusla.

This is a total of 47 UAMs to-date who have arrived in Ireland as part of the IRPP and who are now in the care of the Tusla Separated Children Seeking Asylum Team.

I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my appreciation of the care and professionalism of the Tusla Separated Children Seeking Asylum Team who are providing an invaluable service to unaccompanied minor children arriving under the IRPP and, more generally, through the asylum process.

Travel Documents

339. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** if a person that has been granted leave to remain here can apply for a travel document. [12354/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a person who has been granted leave to remain in the State may apply for a travel document. Unlike a refugee, however, a person with leave to remain does not have an entitlement to be issued with one, and a travel document would be issued solely on a discretionary basis. Each application received for a discretionary travel document is examined on a case by case basis.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

374. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** if the INIS website has ever been subject to a user experience, UX, audit; and if so, the results of the audit. [12930/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department, that no official User Experience audit has been conducted of the INIS website.

The INIS website is subject to ongoing review with the aim of better meeting the needs of the variety of customers who use the website. Feedback is regularly received from users, and is monitored to assess how usability of the site can be improved.

Significant work was carried out during 2017 to improve the readability and usability of the site, and this work continues as part of the functions of a small dedicated website team. Projects planned for 2018 include an upgrade to the website as well as moves towards service delivery through the website.

The website upgrade will be carried out as part of an upgrade to all Department of Justice and Equality websites, and will further improve both the content and usability of the site across a range of devices.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

375. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the reason the automated visa application and tracking system, AVATS, online application form for a join family visa on the INIS website asks applicants to enter a reference number issued by his Department in view of the fact that such numbers are no longer issued. [12931/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that AVATS (Automated Visa Application and Tracking System) is an example of the successful use of information technology in assisting the making of visa applications and the processing of those applications.

Over 125,000 visa applications were made using AVATS in 2017. The system requires applicants to provide certain information to enable a visa officer to make decisions on applications. While some of the information is mandatory, other information is non-mandatory and this is indicated on the online form.

In relation to the use of reference numbers, the format of the number requested on the online form is still in use for older files. This information is non-mandatory and the applicant does not need to provide any response to that question if the information is not applicable to them. INIS also provides a dedicated email address (avatsqueries@justice.ie) to assist with any queries on completing the online application form.

INIS reviews online application procedures on a regular basis and the continued inclusion of this field will be considered in this context.

Work Permits Data

391. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the **Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation** the number of applications for employment permits from asylum seekers that have been made in the past month; and the number of successful applications. [12065/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): From 9th February 2018 International Protection applicants have the right to apply for an employment permit. This is an interim measure until Ireland opts into the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive.

To date no applications for an employment permit have been received from International Protection applicants by my Department.

The Department of Justice and Equality inform me that on 9th February 2018 it established a self-employment scheme for those who have sought International Protection in Ireland that are waiting more than nine months for a first instance decision on their application.

As of the morning of 8 March, the Department of Justice and Equality had received 251 applications for self-employment and 172 of those applications had been granted.

Asylum Support Services

449. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the **Minister for Health** the discussions he has had with the Minister for Justice and Equality or the Reception and Integration Agency, RIA, regarding the need for health care resources and supports at Lisdoonvarna, County Clare, for the proposed direct provision centre to be located there; his plans to ensure the health needs of the residents will be met; and his further plans to ensure that additional general practitioner hours are available in the village as a matter of routine and permanently to support residents and the local community. [11907/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I have had no correspondence with either the Minister for Justice and Equality or the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) regarding a proposed Direct Provision centre in Lisdoonvarna, County Clare.

I understand that the HSE are actively engaged with the Department of Justice and Equality and RIA to provide the necessary health care resources and supports to those living in Direct Provision centres. They engage with the Department of Justice and Equality to ensure structures at community level are in place to support residents in current Direct Provision centres and also in proposed new Direct Provision centres.

The services of a Mobile Health Screening Unit is available to Direct Provision centres to complete a health profile of residents and to help transition groups of people to GP services locally. This alleviates pressure on local GP services and allows for a full medical history to be compiled for onward transmitting to the receiving primary care services and GP. Transport arrangements can be organised where required in conjunction with the Department of Justice and the Centre Management.

Asylum Seekers can access the Health Services in the same way as Irish citizens. They may apply for Medical Cards while living in Direct Provision and are entitled, as a Medical Card holder, to access health services.

There is a Inter-Departmental group led by RIA which comprises statutory agency representation with the aim of collectively addressing any emerging issues within the Direct Provision process. This has proved to be a useful model as a means of collaborating constructively around such issues.

Migrant Integration

1001. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the **Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government** the local authorities that have and have not appointed an officer with responsibility for migrant integration, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12188/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organization arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, the assignment of local authority staff to a particular function, such as migrant integration, is a matter for the Chief Executive.

My Department is responsible for workforce planning for the local government sector, including monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities; however, the data gathered does not provide details in terms of the number of officers with responsibility for migrant integration employed nationally by local authorities. Accordingly, the information requested is not available in my Department.

However, since 2017, my Department has received two staffing sanction requests for Resettlement Support Workers, one from Galway County Council and one from Waterford City & County Council. My Department has approved sanction for both of these requests.

21st March 2018

Direct Provision Data

216. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the **Minister for Justice and Equality** the number of families in a direct provision centre (details supplied) in Dublin 22 by size and number of children; the number with leave to remain; the reason for the recent transfer of 50 families from another centre; when the contract for the direct provision centre ends; and his plans for its renewal. [13052/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Details of the family profiles at the centre in question are outlined in the following table:

Size of Family	Number of families	Total number of persons
Lone Parent with 1 child	17	34
Lone Parent with 2 children	5	15
Lone Parent with 3 children	5	20
Lone Parent with 4 children	4	20
Lone Parent with 5 or more children	2	10
Married/Partner	2	4
Married/Partner with 1 child	3	9
Married/Partner with 2 children	1	4

Married/Partner with 3 children	3	15
Married/Partner with 4 children	4	24
Total	46	155

The total number of persons presently in the accommodation centre with some form of permission to remain in the State is 83.

Of this figure there are:

- 15 who comprise 3-person family (5 families);
- 16 from 4-person families (4 families);
- 15 from 5-person families (3 families)
- 13 from 5+ person Families (2 families)

I can advise the Deputy that 34 persons were transferred into the centre in question in February 2018 from another accommodation centre.

In this instance, the relevant contract in that other accommodation centre had come to an end and as a result the centre closed. Residents who were still in the protection process, total 87 persons, were allocated alternative accommodation within the entire accommodation portfolio.

The contract in this centre is valid until close to the end of 2018. Any renewal of the contract will be subject to a full, open, transparent EU wide competitive process.